

spare Rib

A Women's Liberation Magazine
February 78 Issue 67 35 pence

P523/344

**"They grind you down
to the bone and then sack you"**



**Inside
the catering
industry**

MEN - do they ^{child} care?

Housewife Needles Patriarchy - see page 42

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FEBRUARY 1978



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Ex-Randolph Hotel Shop Steward
Maggie Green
Photographed by Val Wilmer

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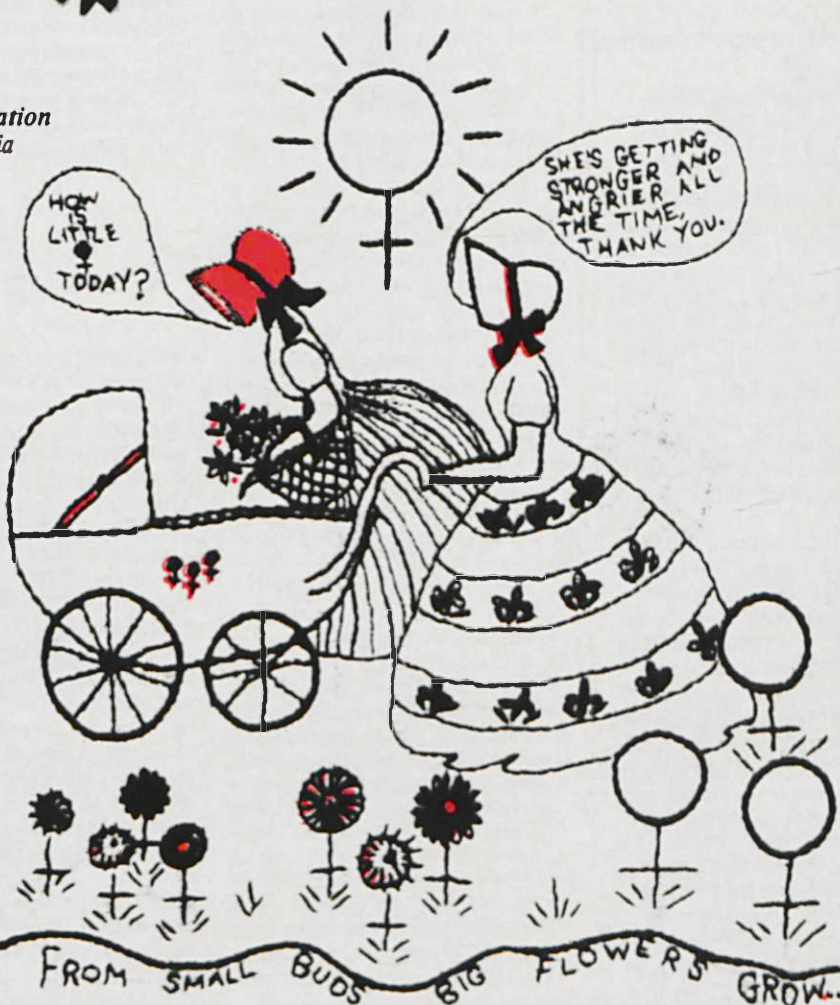
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Spare Rib is produced collectively by Anny Brackx, Barbara Charles, Alison Fell, Susan Hemmings, Sue Hobbs, Laura Margolis, Natasha Morgan, Jill Nicholls, Rosie Parker, Ruthie Petrie, Linda Phillips, Janie Prince, Amanda Sebestyen, Carole Spedding, Lisa Vine, Ruth Wallsgrove.

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More blood money

Dear *Spare Rib*,
How apt the title 'Blood Money' (SR 65) but the follow-up to your article on the sanitary protection racket is enough to make the blood reach boiling point.

I quote from the Times Business Diary of Thursday, November 10: "Which would you say was the most profitable foreign-owned company operating in this country? Esso? Ford? IBM? If you said any of these, you would be wrong, wrong, wrong. The answer, according to Roger Coghill, who helped compile the latest publication from Jordan Dataquest, a survey of foreign-owned companies in Britain, is Tampax, the American-owned maker of menstrual tampons. Pre-tax profits in 1975, Coghill reports, were 42.34 per cent of sales, good enough by any measure—except Tampax's, in that this marked a fall-off from the 1974 figure of 49.48 per cent."

In sisterhood,
Helen Hewland.
London, E1

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To review or not to review?

Dear *Spare Rib*,
We feel it is time *Spare Rib* reviewed its reviews. Judy Baine's review of our film "Stand Together!" (SR 66) (on the Grunwick mass picket) was totally negative and unsupportive. We are open to people's criticism and, in fact, had a lot of discussion on the areas Judy questions while making the film but we would like support as well. Judy fails to distinguish between her feelings about the strike now (disheartened, angry at the disillusionment) and the film itself, which is "inspiring" and "useful" according to the thousands of people who have used it all around the country.

Judy has no basis for caliming that, 'if Jack Dromey had had his way' shots of feminists and their banners 'would have been cut out completely'. The film exposes the sexism of the traditional Trades Union movement without itself being sexist—the question of how much we editorialise on the events of the July 11th mass picket (which is what the film is about) and how much we evoke the way feminists were swamped that day by miners, dockers etc, was decided after much discussion. It is part of the central reflection/manipulation question faced by Left film-makers.

Spare Rib's Review section includes films like 'Stand Together' and 'The Chicago Maternity Center Story' together with 'Star Wars' and 'Julia' as though they are similar commodities. This 'neutral' presentation belies *SR*'s politics and reduces the vast difference between

a \$10,000,000 Hollywood, capitalist 'entertainment' and no-budget, committed films like ours. Also 'Julia' will turn up at your local Odeon soon but you give no indication of how people can see 'Stand Together'. In fact almost anyone can hire it for £17 from The Other Cinema, 12/13 Little Newport Street, London WC2. It now concludes with a new, updated ending which shows how the situation has changed.

Basically, we need support, of all kinds, to survive and be useful. We get it from the diverse groups—Trades Councils, colleges, women's groups, unions, Strike Support Committees, Liberals, Communists, socialists, even War On Want—who have used our films at their meetings, but should we expect none from *Spare Rib*?
The Newsreel Collective.

*Judy Baines says . . .
I'd hate Spare Rib collectively to be held responsible for my journalistic inexperience! I didn't speak to people in the Newsreel Collective about the film, and therefore was misinformed on the point of disagreement between Dromey and The Newsreel Collective. The information I had about the supposed dispute between Dromey and the Collective over the feminist content of the film was got from a*

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woman whom I trust absolutely; and I was prepared to believe it having had experience of Dromey's dismissive attitude towards feminists over the S.E. Region TUC special delegate conference in August.

I would also like to make it clear that, given the terms of reference of the film, there were some highly perceptive images of and messages about women. But I still believe that the terms of reference of the film were limited, even in the summer when the failure of the TU leadership wasn't so apparent. The left must use its propaganda to raise criticisms of power structures and decision making processes within its own organisations in order to learn and change; these criticisms should not only raise questions about the divisions between the leadership and the rank and file of the TU movement, but also, and just as importantly, about sexual and racial divisions, which are not confined to the TU movement.

We differentiate between 'glossies' and 'committed' films within the review itself and feel that the second paragraph of this review did this, anything more than this would be unnecessary. However, we do regret that we did not say where the film is available.
SR Collective

* Indicates letter has been cut for reasons of space.

Who goes with who?

Dear *Spare Rib*,
The Women's Festival 77 looks great. One small question, though. Can anyone tell me why 'Older Women' and 'Handicapped Women' are together in one workshop? (4pm, Sun 11th Dec). Why not 'Handicapped Women' and 'Lesbian Women'? . . . or 'Handicapped Women' and 'Black Women'? . . . or 'Handicapped Women' and 'Younger Women'?

I'm sorry, but I don't get the connection. Maybe it was a mistake?
Love,
Lucy Waugh.
Walthamstow, E17

"Flawless sister"?

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I feel unable and inadequate to answer the specific charges against Maureen Colquhoun, made by your January correspondents, maybe that is up to Maureen herself. But as a member of the Maureen Colquhoun Action Committee, I am convinced that she was sacked for being a Lesbian, and that this cannot happen without a fight. Is anybody a "flawless sister"? Are there, come to that, any remotely flawless MPs? Norman Ashby, chairperson of Northampton North Labour Party Executive Committee, has publicly stated that Maureen was originally adopted as candidate because of her "good family image" supposedly necessary to fit in with the "conventional morality of a marginal working class constituency". She has been sacked for no longer fulfilling that requirement. As to unimportant women not even

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being asked their opinion, one of the groups that has been in contact with us to state their support for Maureen is the Northampton West Indian Parents Association, who I should imagine to have thought seriously about the Racism charge before pledging their name to the campaign.

We are not defending the divine right of MPs, we are defending all Lesbians who face extreme discrimination as women trying to live outside a male society. We're all Lesbians on the Committee, we all know that we can be sacked, lose our children, lose our homes. If Maureen goes down without a murmur, we've been shown to be weak, and the floodgates are then open for further attacks on women everywhere. Of course Maureen's politics are important, and we spend a lot of time and energy on answering accusations of all-kinds. But the issue is Lesbianism, our need to be strong and our right to make our demands, as women are doing within the broader context of the women's movement.

Yours,
Sue Mansi,
London NW2.



Timex anyone?

* Dear *Spare Rib*,
Some friends of mine belonging to a Trade Union (CFDT) and working here in a Timex Factory would like to be helped. They already have written to the local Trade Unions for Timex Factories in England: Dundee, Newcastle and London but they wish to have more information—and from different points of view—since they seem here to get into trouble soon (redundancy, unemployment). Most of the workers (on the shop floor) are women—it must be the same in England! Are they getting organised to fight eventually?

I shall be pleased to get in touch with any women in the above towns that could let us have full information about Timex.
Yours fraternally,
Colette,
France,
c/o *Spare Rib*.

Black night

Dear *Spare Rib*,
It was very morale-boosting to read the accounts of the Reclaiming the Night marches (SR 66) but I was surprised to find in Pat Moan's account of the London march a reference to 'a young black man' who tried to blow out a torch. Pat Moan's article is to do with sexism and therefore I feel that criticism should be against men: we must not be (or appear to be) racist when what we mean to be is anti-sexist.

At no other point does Pat Moan comment on the physical characteristics of the males in the streets—her descriptions are, rightly, on their aggression, emotion, violence, piggishness, sexism, fear, offensiveness, abusiveness, etc. The question of racism in the WLM is a very complicated one and I think the problem of black men/white women is a very tricky one and perhaps the problem is that it has not been worked through enough in discussions. I'm not sure why Pat Moan made that comment—it may well have been unconscious, which is still something we should all be aware of in ourselves. As feminists

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we are surely anti-racist and we must be very careful as feminists to be aware that what we are struggling against is sexism and patriarchy. If we are attacked as women then we must attack a man because he is a man, not as a black man.
Paula McDiarmid,
Brighton.

SR Collective replies
Yes, you're right. In this case the man's race was not the issue.

Anti-Male Bias

Dear *Spare Rib*,
In SR 65 you published a couple of articles—'The Law of the Father'

and 'Giving Up All'—which give the superficial impression of being written from a feminist viewpoint, but which in reality betray an anti-male bias. (It has not yet been demonstrated to my satisfaction that the two are necessarily equivalent.)

The first article seems to be suggesting that being the (biological) father is a less significant fact than being the (biological) mother; and that a man's claim on his child is and ought to be incommensurable with that of the woman; who, by an unintended irony of prejudiced, so-called 'feminist' thinking, is assumed yet again (though this time by an anti-patriarchalist) to have the major, if not sole, responsibility for child-bearing and rearing. This confused position is to be elevated from a contradiction (in feminist terms) into a right!

Of course, there are cruel abuses by individuals and pervading institutional discrimination (legislatively, juridically and bureaucratically) against mothers—that cannot be at issue. But some single women (I for one) would like to see the fathers of their children accorded the same social and legal standing with their children as 'legitimate' fathers enjoy: abolish the civil status of illegitimacy once and for all, in other words, as the article advocates. But not by taking children away from men.

Unmarried fathers are discriminated against as well, and it is often assumed that such a man merely wants to abscond from his fatherhood or alternatively assert his claims (all without foundation, naturally) to the exclusion of the mother.

What is going on? What is wrong with arguing for a father to have as much (but not more) claim on his own child as a mother? Or are we replacing patriarchy with matriarchy, instead of the possibility of non-sexist co-existence and interaction? To exclude a father, on the grounds that he is a man, from equal control of his child, control 'even against the mother's wishes' (indignantly italicised in the article) is a totalitarian and inhuman measure, and is precisely, it seems to me, the sort of sexism that we are trying to undermine in our present male-dominated society.

Yours sincerely,
Lesley Saunders,
Slough, Berks.

E

Rock Folly?

Dear Spare Rib,
Why must you always present being a woman as a problem? Why must everything be so dreary and humourless? A supreme example in your January issue (SR 66) is the review by Susan, Melanie and Maureen of the TV series 'Rock Follies'.

They attacked this dazzlingly inventive series on the absurd

grounds that it was not a nice, simple, straightforward feminist tract. Of course it wasn't—thank goodness. It was a good deal more subtle than that. However, it did provide 5 actresses with some of the best parts of the year for men or women, parts in which they were shown as aggressive, brave, successful, devious, complex, in charge of their own destinies, and other traits normally assumed to be the prerogative of men.

Your reviewers seemed to feel the series could be criticised on two other grounds. One was that it was produced by a man—but perhaps he just happened to come up with the idea and to be the best person for the job? The other was that there were no lesbian love scenes. Whyever should there be? Why must the women's movement carry on with this ridiculous insistence that the only true feminism is the lesbian sort?

Also, girls, it was a satire, meant to be funny, and in my opinion succeeded brilliantly. Can't we ever just enjoy something whether it's making love, having a child, doing a job or just watching a rather good TV series without pondering all the time about the frightful problems it poses?

Love and peace,
Jenny Rogers.
London, W1

Women's creations

* Dear Spare Rib,
In this month's copy (SR 65) there was a statement in the article on 'Shadow Woman' about women's creations being in the present and not lasting. I disagree, what about the novels of the Brontës which have lasted?

In 16th century Bologna in Italy most of the miniatures were painted by women and some of the larger masterpieces which have been forgotten.

I think that is a sweeping statement to make about women's art not lasting. Maybe it's not allowed to last?

Yours in sisterhood,
C Hall.
London, NW8

R

Hollow moralism

Dear Spare Rib,
The anonymous letter-writer who was so scathing about Terry Slater's article 'Deciding to have a baby' (SR 63) adopted a tone of such remote superiority I felt I wanted to write and say how important I think it is to try and write honestly as a feminist about having children. I thought Terry Slater's article was moving precisely because she describes her actual circumstances, doubts and feelings which she did not have glib political phrases for.

The strength of the women's movement for me has always been commitment to uncovering what we feel without forcing experience into stereotypes that don't fit. I believe we are now able to explore the gap between feminism, the unconscious search for an alternative with femininity, the experience of being a woman in the world as it is. It is an essential relationship which Margaret Walters describes very beautifully in her essay on Woolstonecraft, Martineaux, de Beauvoir in 'The Rights And Wrongs Of Women' (ed. Ann Oakley & Juliet Mitchell). I think there is both sustenance and tension in this continuing connection between our aspirations, struggles and organisation and our lives. But to deny this connection is to resort to a hollow moralism like the anonymous letter writer... 'If Ms Slater had wanted a baby of her own and on her own terms, which she obviously did (re her first para) then she should have contrived to have one and rear it on her own and not expect one reluctant male to participate with equal shares which are attendant with the equal rights that she's jealous of.'

This assumes people don't experience contradictory wants—especially people attracting the mystique of Motherhood and feeling new ways of having children. It assumes that single mothers with the whole of capitalist society against them make an abstract free decision to have a child. If ever there was a material situation which made a mockery of this liberal abstract freedom and demanded a society based on mutual co-operation it is pregnancy and the early years of childhood. The women's movement has insisted single mothers need more help both from society and from friends rather than exhortations that they should go it alone with a stiff upper lip.

Terry Slater is *not* writing about 'equal rights'. The inadequacy of equal rights as a basis for feminist theory is all too evident. She is writing about the division of labour

S

between men and women around reproduction and the effect this has on our consciousness and practice. This has been such a crucial area of discussion both in the women's movement and in men's groups but it is often presented in economic terms—ie How do you divide work? Terry Slater touches on the emotional implications of challenging the existing division as a relationship.

Finally... her article begins to look critically at some of the unspoken assumptions within the left in the last ten years. It is easy to sneer as the letter writer does at people who try to change all forms of relationships and who fail. I think it's more important, though,

to consider and learn from our attempts, and find out how we can make changes which do not exhaust us but enable us to make more.

Yours in sisterhood,
Sheila Rowbotham,
London E8.

Looking at porn

* Dear Spare Rib,
Ms Wallsgrove's article on pornography put into words most of my sentiments on that distressing subject (SR 65). I realised the photographs were used in antithetical manner, but for me they just plainly contradicted the idea of the article. To refrain from printing the pornographic pictures would have been to underline the message in the article.

Please, please do not be tempted to use sensational press type ideas—publishing so-called sensational matter on one page while tut-tutting on the other pages.

Delighted to renew my subscription,
Yours as aye,
Jean Aitken.
Dumbarton,
Scotland

Thanks to our readers for so many lovely unexpected Christmas and New Year cards...

Dear Spare Rib,
I didn't think I was such a witless loonie but I'm finding it increasingly difficult to convince the rest of the world that I am not!

My aims are relatively simple:—to get a job, to run a car and afford an el-cheapo one-person flat. Achieving these aims seems to be far from simple, as I will outline here:—

Having taught Geography for 2 years the urge for 'new places, new faces' took me to West Africa still teaching Africans. I came home to find a job famine in the teaching world and have spent the last 18 months bumming about with a series of temporary and supply teaching jobs. Ambition gives way to apathy as realisation dawns—it is not cool to be separated and seeking independence, especially if you can't type!... the obvious key to female success.

I have recently been offered a job at the wonder-rate of £1800 a year. A sum which will not pay the bills, never mind buy beer and cigarettes.

What is one to do? Suggestions on a postcard to...

Liz,
13 Greyfriars,
Wells Park Road,
London SE26.
PS Happy Christmas and keep up the good work!

Letters to:
27 Clerkenwell
Close
London
E.C.1.



"These people who work in hotels and catering are different people. They are better people. Kind people. Good people. They are well-dressed people. Polite people. I don't construe politeness as servility. I construe it as good manners. There are some bullies, rude people, but we don't tolerate them."

Charles Forte to the Sunday Times Magazine

ANNY BRACKX TALKS WITH THE "RUDE PEOPLE", AND FINDS OUT WHAT GOES ON BEHIND THE HOTEL DOORS.

THE CINDERELLA INDU

"I believe that 1977 will see a further expansion of the tourist trade... the queen's jubilee will undoubtedly be an added attraction."

Charles Forte definitely knows his trade; English hotels did indeed experience a considerable bookings boom last year. Trust Houses Forte (THF); in which Sir Charles holds 10% of the total shares is the biggest hotels group in this country. Their 1976 pre-tax profits were almost double those of 1975, amounting to £23,600,000. So 1977's pickings must be pretty substantial.

But 1977 also heard some rumblings from the staff quarters. Barely 13% of 1,200,000 hotel and catering workers—over 60% are women—belong to a union. And union recognition was becoming a pressing issue. Linton Lodge Hotel workers had to picket their privately-owned hotel for five and a half months before they got it through. Others were less successful. THF staff at the Randolph Hotel in Oxford, Grosvenor House Hotel in Sheffield and Night Out Club in Birmingham, were out on strike for several months—they didn't get their union recognised and lost their jobs. "I won't be bullied," was Sir Charles's answer. This Victorian entrepreneur, who employs over 50,000 workers in this country, claims to give his staff self-respect instead. Until the strike, Randolph Hotel chambermaid Maggie Green had been

earning £20.63 before tax for a gruelling 30-hour week. Self respect indeed.

The New Earnings Survey for 1977 indicates that female hotel & catering workers earned on average £37 per 40-hour week, which not only means the lowest wages of all industries but also £6 less than the average female manual worker and slightly more than half the average weekly male manual rate. No wonder 150 employees walked out of the Metropole Hotel in London at the beginning of October when their General & Municipal Workers Union (GMWU) official told them their case for a £50 minimum wage was strong enough. Now, three months later, seven of them are still picketing, but without strike pay or union support. "They dropped us and are trying to hang us on the twelve month rule*," bites former chambermaid Anne Lineham.

Why are so few workers unionised in an industry which absorbs seven per cent of Britain's total labour force? And why have so many recent strikes been ineffectual? Why are the wages so low? And why do so many women take up hotel & catering jobs?

THE BOSSES HIRE AND FIRE

"Our industry," the Hotel & Catering

Industry Training Board (HCITB) asserts, "is an industry of individualists. We like to be independent and to run things with the minimum of outside interference." This is true for giants like THF, but it applies especially to the thousands of small privately-managed snackbars, pubs, restaurants, and hotels... which on average don't employ more than five to ten workers. Scattered and isolated from each other in small establishments, they are often at the mercy of an authoritarian boss, who justifies his actions by saying that he has to cope with the erratic patterns of customer demand in the industry.

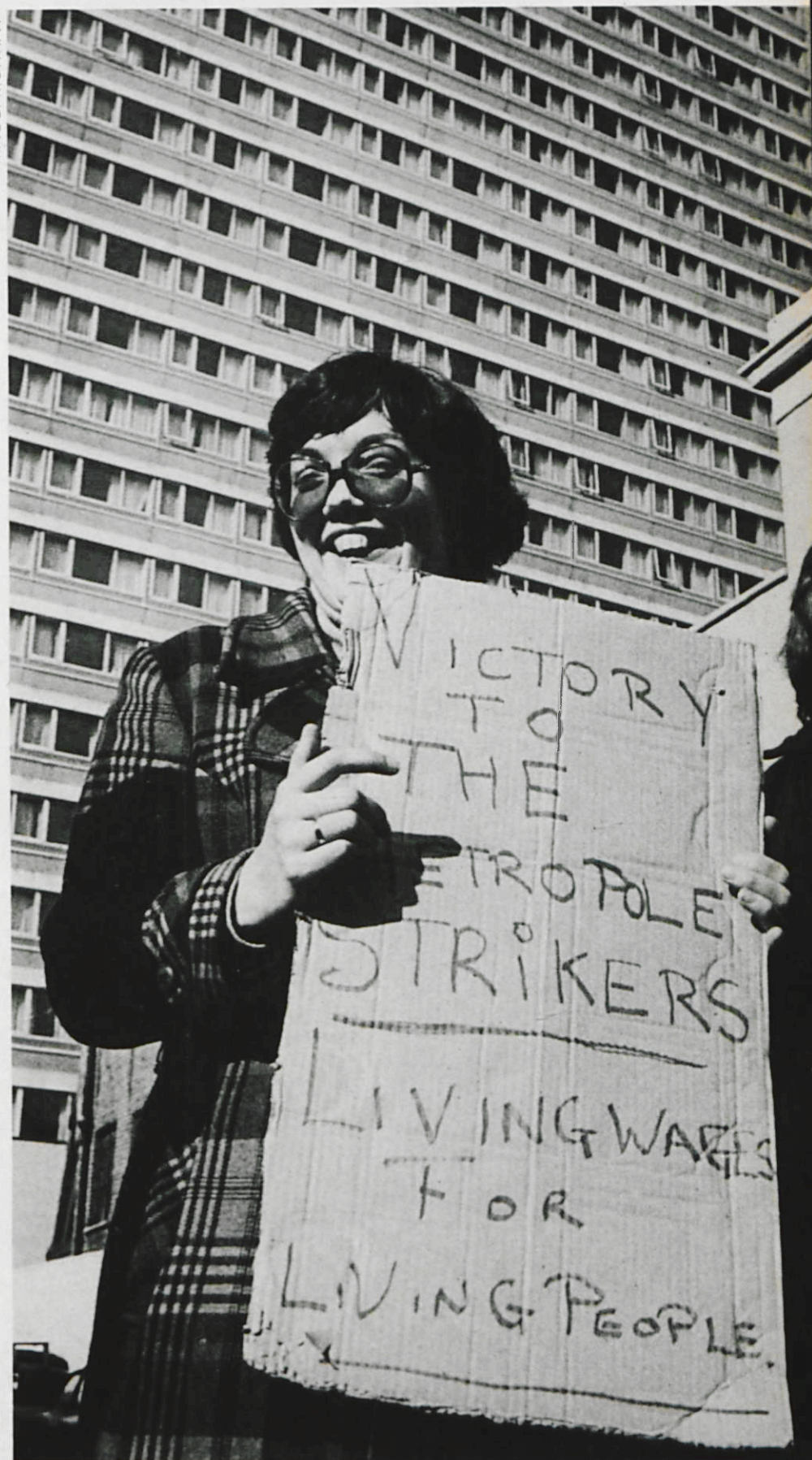
Last summer Reka Takacs went back to work at Berties, a small snackbar in Oxford, after having been home four days with a foot injury, and found someone else doing her waitressing job. She had been replaced, and became redundant on the spot, without notice or sick pay. The owner snapped "I run a business."

Susan, who worked at the Belfry Hotel near Oxford in the summer of '76, had her share of 'crisis management'. "I did a four-hour stint early in the morning 6.00-10.00, which was preparing for breakfast. At week-ends that overlapped with getting lunch ready, because there was so much to do; you just had your break when everything

* The Twelve Month Rule is part of an agreement between the government and the TUC to curb inflation, which requires a twelve month interval between wage increases after the 5% settlement under Phase Two.

INDUSTRY

MAGGI MURRAY



cleared up—and sometimes it just didn't. Weekdays, I was usually off at 10.30/11.00 but then, if you're working in the bar, you come off breakfast and have to go straight into the bar and carry on there. Obviously you swiped the odd cup of coffee along the way, but you couldn't actually sit down and relax. If you did, there were the bosses hurtling around all over the place, shouting. I worked there for four months, and that was enough; I mean I had to leave out of sheer exhaustion. They didn't really have to consider yearly holidays, because nobody ever stayed that long. They seemed to work their business on grinding you down to the bone and then sacking you. Towards the end I was earning £25 a week and that was it; no sickness benefit scheme or anything like that, and we never got any overtime pay or extra pay for nightwork. And we did work longer, because either they were short of staff, or they kept the bar open until three in the morning, or some long-stay guest decided to throw a party . . . and then there was a lot of clearing up to do."

Maggie Green now works as a scout, cleaning students' rooms at Lincoln College. She prefers her new job "for a start there's nobody chasing you round. Management at the Randolph Hotel went round wiping their finger around the cupboards. And if the housekeeper caught you talking you were in trouble, and you were on your own. Before we joined the union there and got things changed, we had to

Picketing the Metropole Hotel

THE CINDERELLA INDUSTRY



do 20 bedrooms in five and a half hours; you hadn't got time to Hoover even. You had to rush like nobody's business."

Hiring and firing has always been a matter of course in this business, which has an annual labour turnover of 83%. Even after Maggie's housekeeping department had joined the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), the new manager went immediately on the offensive to quash any militancy based on job security. "If you work my way, you'll be alright; and if you don't you're out, regardless of your contract." This type of intimidation is not at all exceptional. It scares staff into either keeping their membership secret or not joining up. At the Belfry Hotel, where Cathy Sherlock used to be a receptionist, they never thought of unions. "There was this legendary story that the majority did join up at one time, and that they got sacked straight away; by the evening, apparently the bosses had re-employed enough casual staff to run smoothly."

Casual labour, hired by the day, is the trump card management can always play "just to underline that we're dispensable" says Metropole Hotel senior shop steward John Bruce. "Less casual staff was one of our demands when we first came out on strike. But as soon as we were out, double pay was offered to casuals to replace us, and taxis to and from work." It's an easy turn for the employers; they don't have to pay insurance stamps, holiday pay, or worry about workers claiming their rights. At first it seemed obvious to me to support the strikers' demand; but it becomes less straightforward when you're

faced with the fact that, apart from students and seasonal labour, casual workers are usually the elderly, immigrants, and people who would generally find it very difficult to get a job.

THE UNIONS WHEEL AND DEAL

Recruitment is difficult for a number of other reasons. A lot of foreigners work in the catering & hotel industry, many of whom don't speak English. Maria Ramos, formerly headwaitress/cashier at the Metropole Hotel, where only 10% of the 280 staff are British, thinks foreigners find vacancies in catering because "the British don't want to work there; it's hard, and I don't think they would accept the conditions that we do." Frequently they aren't join a union because they come from countries where trade unions are illegal. In addition they are more than others dependent on the goodwill of the manager, who is the one who applies to the Department of Employment for their work permit renewal, on which their stay in this country depends. George Abrahams, a TGWU official dealing with the industry, told me he thought it wrong that employers hold that amount of power, but he didn't come up with any suggestions for action. His final remark that, by the end of '78 the Minister of Employment would probably stop issuing work permits for the hotel & catering industry anyway, and that this

would give British nationals a chance, conjured up too vivid an image of a union jack for me to prolong the conversation more than was necessary.

Trade unionists also quote the high number of women as a reason for the low militancy level. But I would agree with the Low Pay Unit that "it's perhaps part of union mythology that women do not really join unions and do not naturally act collectively." What about Trico, and Grunwick? What about the mainly female School Meals Service, where the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) hold 90% membership. And what about the Randolph Hotel, where it was the chambermaids who set the ball rolling. But the suspicion seems unfortunately to be reciprocated by now. Maggie, who was a shopsteward at the time, has lost complete faith in the TGWU, and its wheeling, dealing bureaucracy. "They're a dead loss as far as I'm concerned; the strike was official the same day we came out, and seven months later, Hulett, the union official, comes and tells us there would be no more union support and that strike pay would be stopped." The TGWU and THF had apparently come to an agreement—not over recognition—but that in future the union would see that all disputes with THF were settled before they could reach the stage of strikes. Similarly the GMWU lost its credibility with many of the Metropole Hotel workers, who after having been encouraged to come out by their local official, were told on their third day, that the strike was out of order. When I queried this with GMWU research assistant Jo Sinclair, she answered that the wage claim was indeed contravening the twelve month rule*, that democratic union decisions ought not to be broken, and that anyway all except seven went back when advised. Not a word about the starvation wages, which might just have vindicated this strike. "Could you live in Central London on £32.30 or £35.00 per week before any deduction?" is one of the pertinent questions in the strike bulletin.

To make matters worse, both unions seem to compete for members, which makes for an unskilful and unco-ordinated approach to the real problems of unionisation in this sector. This can result in sudden bursts of recruitment, with which officials are unable to cope, so that shopstewards get to see very little of them, don't receive the necessary educational material, and hardly any guidance in how to establish consultative and grievance procedures. The effect is that stewards get fed up, the members disappointed, and that they stop paying their subs. This is very bad politics in an industry with a massive labour turnover, which therefore is extremely dependent on shopstewards for continuity. The fluctuation in membership is probably one of the reasons why neither union could come up with recent national membership figures for the industry.

But it's too easy to blame everything on union bureaucracy. The point is that as long as the shopfloor movement is

weak, conditions and wages will be poor. I'm sure Charles Forte cannot have been very worried about the chances of last year's strikes spreading; he knew there would not be a show of solidarity from the other THF services because there just wasn't the network linking the staff.

NO GOLDEN HANDSHAKE

The Government's solution to ensure that workers in the sweated trades—mainly women—literally don't starve was to set up Wages Councils, which establish minimum wage rates for their industry. They increased the minimum rate for 390,000 catering workers from £30 to £34 a week, starting this month. Big deal . . . In 1974 £30 was the Supplementary Benefit level for a two-child family; if you earned less, you were officially 'poor'. But minimum wage rates don't seem to fill the employers with awe. Government Wages Inspectors found in their survey a year ago, that over 30% didn't even pay their staff the required minimum. Very few were prosecuted.

When I asked Maggie how she managed on her £17.19 after tax she said nodding towards a man in the room "well I had to rely on him. I lodged with his brother. That was alright, because I was only paying a fiver a week. I used to have breakfast at digs, then have a mid-day meal at the Randolph—it wasn't good, because they used to give us the leave-offs of the guests. That was my food for the day."

The HCITB speaks of the industry's low pay 'image', implying that there are various perks hidden under the carpet. It also emphasises that it is "difficult to put an accurate value on the benefits in kind (meals, accommodation) received". It is true that a lot of women consider themselves lucky to find a job in a hotel. "I had been abroad and I came back with no money and nowhere to live. A job at the Belfry meant I had both at the same time; I didn't even have to pay for living in." But Susan soon found out what 'living-in' meant. "We had to trample through the mud to reach our grim prefabs; all the rooms were damp and smelly, and the heating was never on." The Metropole also provides living-in facilities, for its staff, but it certainly is no benefit of any kind; Ann's take-home pay used to be £19.80 a week, because management took off £10.50 at source for her room, which she shared with two others.

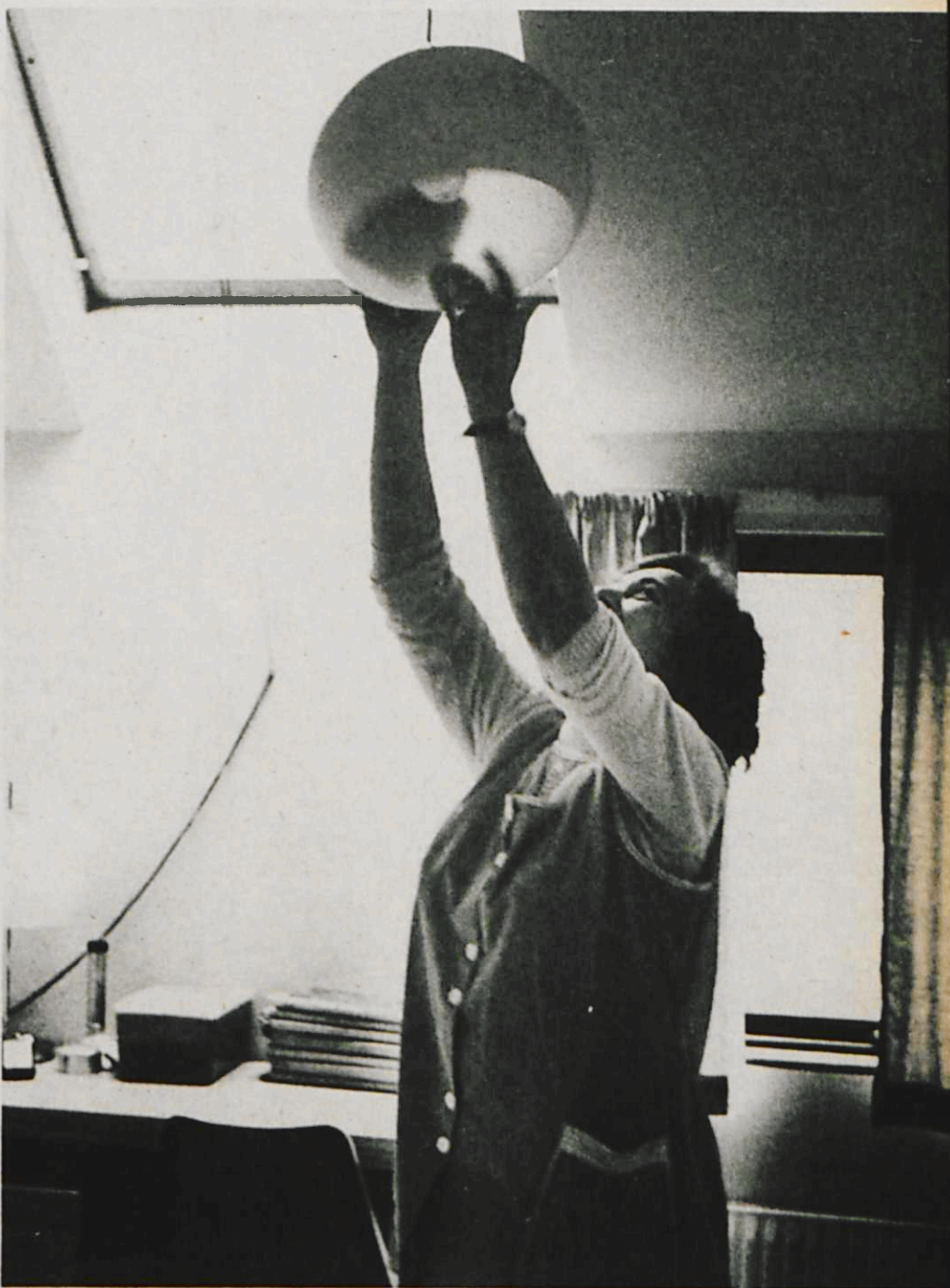
And what about the golden handshakes then, tips, service charge and fiddles? Who gets them? Susan didn't, nor did Cathy or Ann; Maggie sometimes got tipped, and Reka never got more than £1.75 a week in her restaurant. All of them complained about the service charge con. "I worked in reception and I added it to the bill. The purpose of it is that staff who don't have contact with the customers get a share. But the way they distribute it is entirely up to

the management," complained Cathy. In fact this money is the employer's property, according to the Department of Employment. Often the staff don't see a penny of it, and it's even rumoured that service charges pay for casuals. Management also use it to buy loyalty; playing staff off against each other by rewarding some vital members like chefs and porters. Women are usually at the bottom of the pile, and get forgotten.

But why do women go in for this kind of work? Well, some say part-time chamber-maiding in hotels fits in with school hours and childcare. And Maggie liked being off at three because she needed time to do her own housework. For others, the possibility of living-in provides them with some kind of refuge. Jo Mayfield, who has been a receptionist/bookkeeper at British Rail's Great Northern Hotel for fourteen years

felt that for many of the women there, who do a full-time job, and who live in, hotel work had become a way of life; significantly most of them are single, widowed or divorced. But perhaps the abusive comment, directed at the picketing Randolph chambermaids, by a passer-by, provides the nearest clue to why women work in this business. "I wouldn't pay 75p an hour for housework," he said. And it is true that for women, working in catering and in hotels is just professionalisation of what they've always done at home.○

*For more information contact the Hotel and Catering Workers National Action Committee, 21 Scala St, London W1. They've published a pamphlet **The Hotel Strikes, Lessons for Unionisation**, or the Low Pay Unit, 9 Poland St, London W1, who brought out some up to date information in their June 77 Bulletin **Catering for the Low Paid**.*



ANNY BRACKX

Maggie Green cleaning at Lincoln College in Oxford

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Thanks to all those who sent in entries but weren't lucky this time—better luck next time!

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An Unwritten Story: Explanation of (plus apology for) : by Nadia Wheatley

• The setting

This is the Author. Watch her sweep.

Swish-swish, swish-swish, what a lovely sound. Soon she'll have the dirt from all the corners and crannies in a nice little pile in the centre of the room, and then Flip-whoosh, Flip-whoosh, she'll sweep the dirt with the small brush into the pink plastic dustpan and the whole floor will sparkle and shine. Well, not quite, for it really needs a mop too, but she is contenting herself with merely sweeping today, mopping tomorrow. After all she's an Author, not a bloody housewife.

The Author looks up now. She smiles apologetically. She is very sorry that she hasn't written a story for you today. There was a story that she was going to make for you today, a real story with words, grammar, syntax, language, plus characters even, a plot, conversation, action, a theme, analysis, feeling, and a moral to boot; but somehow, the sweeping, it gets behind until you simply cannot put it off another moment; you know how it is. She would have loved to have given the story to you. It is a pity isn't it. Never mind.

: The setting (again, folks)

This is the Author: watch.

We call her the Author although she is a female person because she hates the word "Authoress". (She's liberated.) We call her the Author because we prefer to be polite to her; after all, she is polite to us.

You can tell that this Author is a female person because she wears an apron. This is not an infallible test, I admit; it is true that certain male persons wear aprons—butchers, for example, and chefs and sometimes carpenters and of course Masons and husbands cooking the picnic barbecue. But in a case such as this where it is known that the wearer is an Author it is a reliable test, for male-Authoring is not one of the occupations in which aprons are used. The Author wears her apron for writing as well as sweeping: that way she can pop in and out between paragraphs and salt the potatoes. Most eaters prefer salt in their potatoes. The people who wear the Author's potatoes are no exception.

women's bop AND mixed bop in FEB
see page TWO for details

Change of scene

Let's have a change of scene now shall we? After all, an Author(ess) is not an inexhaustible topic. Shall we look at a man instead?

This is a Man. He lives in the same house as the Author. Ooooooh look, here's another one! He does too. They are not sweeping. (They read.) Though they do sweep sometimes, mind you. These are not sexist Men. You'd be surprised to see how often it happens that after the Author has swept around the house for about half an hour "doing a Shulamith Firestone" the Men too take up Squeegees, dustpans, damp rubber sponges, New Ajax. It's pretty easy to prey on their conscience. They have read even more Greer-Mitchell-Firestone-Millet-etc than the Author has; they are very fast readers (because, being male, they are intelligent?) Also, at night, when the three of them read, she often has to keep one eye on the potatoes. These Men like salt on their spuds.

The phrase "doing a Shulamith Firestone" is a household in-joke. (It is a witty and literate household, so there are jokes.) The Author made up the joke. (She isn't one of those feminists who have lost their sense of humour.) One day, when she was very angry, sweeping, her face set, feeling martyr-ish, hating all men, the Men started getting nervous. The Author sensed this (because, being female, she is sensitive?) and felt guilty. Oh don't mind me, she said, (or words to this effect), I am just sweeping because I feel like it, don't think I'm doing a Shulamith Firestone. (Sorry, I guess it's one of those jokes that don't repeat very well, but it certainly caused a laugh at the time and relieved the tension.) The Men took over the joke. So now when the Author silently sweeps and her mouth takes on a Buchenwald look the Men nudge each other and smile and say, Oh look, she's doing a Shulamith Firestone. The words "Shulamith Firestone" have also become in this household a synonym for what unliberated women call "the chores". The Author has forgotten (because, being female, she is scatterbrained?) that this was originally her "joke".

A spot of action: a story even

Enough scene-setting. Let's have a bit of action now, a story even. That's what you came for isn't it?

A woman (the Author) sweeps. She has a nice little pile of dirt in the middle of the room. It is growing. Swish-swish. Her face is very set and red and she looks angry and most unattractive. Her hair is pulled back with elastic. You cannot hear what she is saying because she is speaking to herself inside her head. Her words, if you want to know (and I apologise because they are so dull, but she is not being clever, witty, original, whatever, because after all the Men cannot hear the words inside her head), these words are along the lines of Bloody Men, fucking men, it's all very well them offering to do the washing-up, they never even *see* the dirt in the corners, I've never known a man who de-frosted a fridge or cleaned a bath off his own bat, why didn't their mothers ever teach them, I've left that bottle-top there on the step for a week now and they haven't even noticed it, they're not even offering today, just sitting on their arses reading. Her head is also plotting the disgusting jobs she will set them in revenge when finally they notice she is sweeping and come in to say: Is there another broom.

The Plot Thickens

You must be getting sick of this Beckettish one-actor stuff, so:

Enter: A Man (one of the two we saw before).

He opens his mouth. He speaks. The Author knows what he will say (because, being female, she is intuitive?) He will say: Is there another broom.

Dialogue

The Man opens his mouth. He speaks. The Author was wrong (because she is female?) The man does not say: Is there another broom. He says: I have just been reading your latest short story. It's marvellous, absolutely superb! I am quite bowled over by it! You really get to grips with that housewife, whatshername, and with the sort of liberated studenty woman too; but no, really, *all* your female characters are marvellously done. And the way you capture the rhythms of women's thoughts! Absolutely superb! I simply couldn't put it down. And your analysis of role-playing in this sexist society: quite fantastic! I'd really like to talk to you about it some time. By the way, is there another broom.

The Author's face flushes redder: happy red. Exhilarated red. Joy. Praise. Recognition. We see that she's really not ugly at all.

Oh no, she says, no really, no truly, no I'm only doing this because I feel like a break. Swish-swish.

Action

The Man departs. (We do not see the other man.)

The Ending (always the most important part to a story, I think, don't you?)

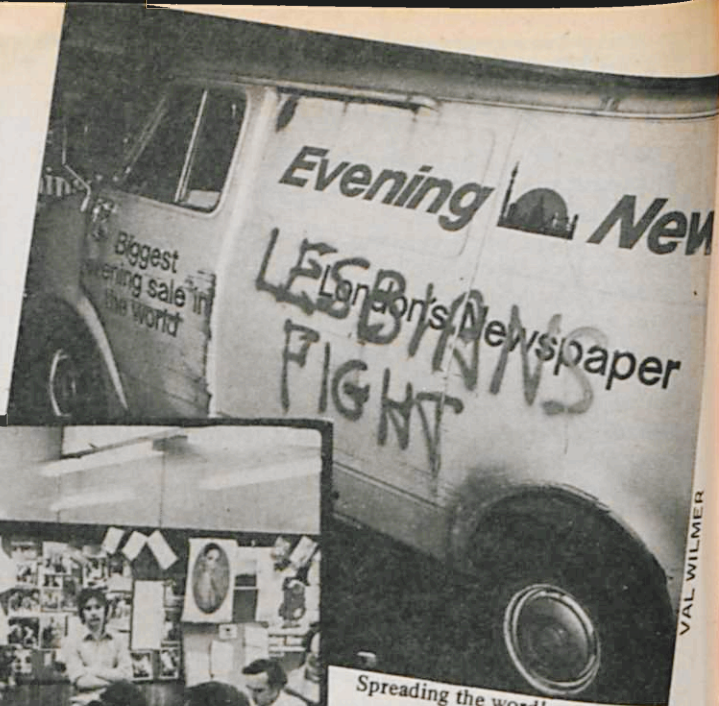
A woman approaches me. It is the Author.

She whispers in my ear. She tells me that she would like me to apologise to you for the fact that she did not write a story for you today but really, really-truly (she whispers sincerely), really it was one of those days when she just felt like a break. You know how it is. ●



NEWSHORTS

lesbian mums
OK



Confusion . . . solidarity . . . an attempt to ignore it

Spreading the word!

used. He felt extremely harassed, reporters had hung around his flat and followed him — Gestapo tactics not journalism.

AID has been available to lesbians for 30 years in France — it's not so new. Even if legislation is now brought in here to make AID available only to married couples, lesbians will still have children. The *Evening News* will merely have encouraged lesbians to go through short periods of heterosexual promiscuity. It's amazing the indignation that lesbians loving children has aroused — how about that anger being directed to men who batter their wives? Pillars of society are screaming out that lesbians are not fit to be mothers — especially to boys. After all we don't want a nation of 'poofs' who haven't had a big butch dad to mould them into aggressive heads of future households. Those sort of men might even cry when they feel sad! □ Barbara Charles

Taking over the News

On January 6 about 50 of us from various groups including Action for Lesbian Parents and Gay Sweatshop, staged a sit-in in the editorial office of the *Evening News* to protest against a series of sensational articles they had published about lesbians getting pregnant through Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID). 'Sleuth' Joanna Patyna spent two months conscientiously infiltrating lesbian organisations pretending to be a lesbian wanting to have a child. She wrote the articles in a way

bound to create an anti-lesbian backlash — MPs have since called for the 'banning of these babies'.

After two hours of singing and chanting in their office, whose walls were papered with nudes and 'sex scoops' of the past, we were granted an audience with Kirby, the Editor. When asked if he realised what the effect of the articles would be, he replied "I don't know". He finally agreed to publish a statement from us and we left to face one immediate effect of the articles — shouts from men outside of "Burn them"! The press in its reporting of this demonstration assumed that the women demonstrators were all lesbians — they were not. This issue is about our right as women to control our bodies.

Many places were spray-painted that night — law courts, British Medical Association, Houses of Parliament — including Patyna's flat ("Here lives a gutter press reporter".) Before the *Evening News* story came out, *Spare Rib* was contacted by one of the donors

asking for advice — he said he had been given 24 hours in which to cooperate with them over the story or have his name



Up against the wall — Kirby faced by our demands

NEWS COPYDATES

SR 68 — January 25

SR 69 — February 22

If it's urgent, it's worth trying after these dates

* A Liverpool schoolgirl was so afraid to tell her parents she was pregnant that she gave birth alone in the bathroom and left the baby in a drawer, where it died. Fortunately the coroner at the inquest was sympathetic to the girl, but how appalling that fear and ignorance are still so powerful . . .

PROGESTASERT Worth worrying about

Yet another 'revolutionary' new intra-uterine device has been withdrawn by its distributors pending the results of further trials.

The Progestasert (an IUD which releases small quantities of progesterone into the womb) was developed in America by the Alza Corporation. Tests on 5000 women indicated that the device has a lower expulsion rate than other IUDs and comparable rates of pregnancy. Its biggest selling point is that it reduces blood loss. The device was approved by the various licensing bodies and has been in use in this country since last year, mostly through clinics undertaking trials. But a few months ago researchers at the Family Planning Research Unit at Exeter University discovered disturbing evidence concealed in the clinical data supplied by Alza. One in five (20%) of those women who do become pregnant with the device in place are likely to have ectopic (tubal) pregnancies. This is 5-7 times higher than the rate of ectopic pregnancies among women using other IUDs. Dr Robert Snowden, head of the research unit, contacted May and Baker, the British distributors, who have decided to stop promoting the Progestasert and have written to all doctors who have fitted it.

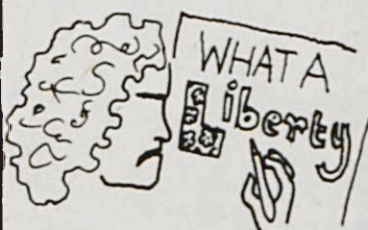
The actual number of ectopic pregnancies would be small - 20% of an overall pregnancy rate of 2.3% a year - but of the 3-6000 women estimated to be using the device in Britain, between 12 and 24 could be seriously affected. There is no way of ascertaining in advance who is at risk and once an ectopic pregnancy has been established the repercussions are unpleasant. The only treatment is the surgical removal of the affected fallopian tube.

Kings College Hospital has made reassuring noises, writing to all the women fitted with these IUDs in their clinic to say there is no need for concern, that Kings have not found similar results but that, if women are 'unduly worried' they are welcome to see a doctor at the clinic. As a Progestasert-user myself, it is hard to feel reassured. There seems to be no reason why British studies should show significantly different results

from those in America.

If you have a Progestasert IUD it is important to avoid pregnancy, possibly by using additional protection until you can visit a clinic. If you are pregnant with a device in place you should get immediate medical advice and if you have an abortion it is vital that the products of pregnancy are analysed to ensure that the foetus was in the uterus and has been removed. □

Angela Phillips



When Jane Hatherall applied for a job as sales rep for Liberty's, the posh London store, she got this reply from Mr J H Carter:

"The territory to be covered is a large one. Even when not staying away overnight it is not unusual for a representative to get home at 7pm or later.

"I feel that these unsocial hours and conditions are not compatible with the domestic responsibilities

* A ten-year-old Derbyshire girl drove a fork-lift truck while breaking into a factory with friends. But she crashed it, caused £220 worth of damage and got caught. The magistrate gave her a conditional discharge, an endorsement to her driving licence when she's allowed to have one, and this Awful Warning: "Reports say you like to be a tomboy but our advice is: 'Keep away from boys, they only get you into trouble.' " Can't we even make trouble in our own right? ...

of a married woman and could even impose undue stresses on the marriage."

Furious, Ms Hatherall wrote a tirade back to Liberty's management: "This letter is extremely offensive, it makes me feel quite ill ... Please note that I and only I will decide how I shall live and conduct my married life ... My present job is demanding and would you believe, I do not arrive home until, dare I say it, that late hour of 7pm.

"Is Mr Carter married? I pity his wife, what a one-sided relationship they must have. Mind you I doubt if you asked him whether his responsibilities as a father and husband would affect his career, of course not don't be silly he has a slave at home." JN

FASCIST THREAT

A workshop on women and fascism, held in Brighton in December, was conceived at a general meeting of Brighton Women's Liberation after many of us had been on the anti-National Front march at Lewisham and on the picket-line at Grunwick's. We felt a need to work out our ambivalent feelings towards violence; both the violence we were threatened with by police and NF thugs, and the violent implications of 'smashing them on the streets'. In discussion, however, new questions arose. Why should women be specially worried by fascism? What is the best strategy against it? How should we work with other anti-fascist groups who are themselves sexist and patriarchal? (The convenor of Brighton Anti-Fascist Committee called this workshop "sectarian and divisive"!) Just how does the extreme right make an appeal based on sexism? What is a feminist perspective on fascism?

These are some of the points that emerged. Women are very vulnerable to reactionary propaganda and a glorification of motherhood precisely because of their isolation and subordination. The NF makes an appeal against (black) muggers and rapists on the level of

'protect your women' and a defence of the family and morality against 'degenerates' such as 'women's libbers' and gays. This is ironic since they themselves are so wont to beat up people they disapprove of, and since a mentality of aggression and sexism lays the basis for rape. Perhaps we should concentrate on this hypocrisy and clarify what our differences are.

It was difficult to work out a strategy; for one thing, the sexism we're attacking in fascism seems only an exaggeration of the status quo. But we must be clear about the difference between general sexism and prejudice, and the total, institutionalised threat that fascism presents. As for 'smashing them on the streets' - some women felt intimidated and didn't go, others saw this strategy as typical macho bravado, and still others saw a role for demos, either as they are or in a different form.

We decided to write a pamphlet against the NF and distribute it locally. We'd like to hear ideas from other groups. Perhaps the next national WL conference could have a workshop on this? **Planning Group**

Contact Soc/Sci Pigeon Hole P/8, Univ. of Sussex, Brighton



* 10-year-old Catherine Pullan of Maidenhead, the only girl on a pistol-shooting course, beat all the boys in a knockout competition. Having learnt to fire .22 and .117 calibre pistols, she's moving on now to another course. ...

* A sop to the movement ... 68-year-old Judge Neil McKinnon, sentencing a London pump operator to six years for rape and a concurrent four year term for wounding with 'intent to cause grievous bodily harm' (hitting the woman over the head with a bottle), commented; "If sexual offences are not punished in accordance with the tariff we have in this court then we shall certainly hear from the women's rights organisations, and quite properly so." While it's good that our anger is noticed and rape taken more seriously by the men at the top, we must begin to think about alternatives to the prison system, which does nothing to undermine sexism ...

* It was the same judge, McKinnon, who let off racist leader Kingsley Read, charged under the 1965 Race Relations Act for his 'niggers, wogs and coons' speech. As well as showing his ignorance of the realities of racism by droning on about being nicknamed 'nigger' himself at public school, McKinnon came up with this amazing view of history: "The fact is a large number of our forebears went abroad. They took their families, they made their homes and they worked with the indigenous coloured population. Such was the affection engendered by (them) that no sooner did the white man grant independence and freedom to govern themselves, than the black man wanted to follow the white man to England." And he is supposed to be a judge of racism? ...



* In an identification parade in Glasgow to spot a young black rapist, Bassey Duke was the only black. The rest of the line-up were white, but for one Pakistani. Surprise, surprise, Bassey was 'identified', then tried and found guilty. The police say they did try to find other young blacks with Afros, but none were available ...

Jill Nicholls

NEWSHORTS



Turn you on?

When Lincoln printers saw the local Women's Action Group's pin-up calendar 'For Women Only', they refused to touch it. Naked men? It must be pornographic! After four refusals the women finally found a printer — in Birmingham. The whole issue exploded in the *Lincolnshire Echo*, with heated letters supporting "the noble printing profession for having the courage of their convictions" or laying into them for censoring "attractive photographs of attractive men both nude and semi-nude".

What puzzled me, reading all the correspondence, was whether the calendar was a spoof or serious. The Action Group's press release made it sound in earnest: "'For Women Only 1978' was designed to help redress the balance as far as sexual equality is concerned . . . Men have always had the monopoly of sexual enjoyment. For centuries they have had the privilege of ogling female bodies and women have had to oblige by contorting and prettifying

themselves . . . But it's now easier for women to support themselves in comfort. And why shouldn't modern women enjoy the male body in an abstract form and enjoy being turned on by sexy pictures of men? No reason at all — except that men feel threatened that this will mean a reversal of present sex roles."

This worries me — we don't want to reverse sex roles, do we, even if this were possible? We want something completely different; we want to transform sexuality. I don't want equal opportunities to ogle. The group do touch on these ideas: "Lincoln Women's Action Group does not want to put men in the position of the traditional female pin-up — nor do they want women to continue being represented in this servile role. Their calendar does not present men in degrading positions, involve any loss of their dignity or attack on their independence."

But how can a pin-up *not* be a sex object? and can such solemnity be erotic? I sent off for the calendar to see. One or two images stand out as

delightful jokes — like feather duster above — reversing the roles to show how impossible the pose is the other way around; it can only be a man's eye view of woman, kittenish, coquette. In a man such subservience is — absurd. But then there's the black stud, glowering in captivity, eyes over the shoulder and hand on the flies. We're meant to *enjoy* this? I asked Emma de Winter of LWAG why they produced the calendar: "I can't say exactly, because although it was one woman's serious idea, we took it up and did it, without analysing it that hard till we met opposition." She does say they learned a lot about cameras and lighting and got support, "vocal and active", from women who'd never heard of them before. But did they really need naked men for that? □ Jill Nicholls

The calendar costs £1.30 inc. postage from LWAG, c/o 33 Burton Road, Lincoln. In SR 33 Margaret Walters analyses glossy 'playmales' in Playgirl and Viva — available from SR at 40p inc. postage.

A Page Three of Our Own

When the editor of the *East London Advertiser* asked male reporters to keep an eye open for likely looking barmaids etc to live up the pages, reporter Barbara Day didn't like to throw cold water on the idea. So she suggested that instead of spreading female flesh all over their pages they should try male pin-ups. Much to her surprise the suggestion was accepted on condition that she found the models. So, Man Friday was born. The first candi-

date was a local fireman but the course of sexploitation didn't run too smooth. Her colleagues received bitter complaints from other firemen that Man Friday was bringing the whole fire service into disrepute.

Even among the staff there have been rumblings of discontent. One of the staff photographers is reluctant to participate in this scheme. He feels that pin-ups male or female are exploitative and will have nothing to do with it. Barbara privately agrees: "I see it as a gigantic sendup. I look out for words like 'lipsmacking' on other Page Threes, and then apply them to our Man Friday . . . But most people take it all quite seriously. We've even got a waiting list!" A P

The Changing Face of Time

Kay Sykes (a self-confessed grandmother) has recently launched her new enterprise . . . an agency for older women seeking secretarial work. Undoubtedly there is a problem of ageism in the employment world which hits women worse and secretaries in particular.

Some women lose their skills in the years they've spent bringing up children; others are abandoned in their thirties because in many firms if you don't make executive level by thirty you have no chance of further promotion . . . how many women have a chance to succeed in a cut-throat race like that? Of course the most obvious 'skill' women unwittingly have to sell is youth with its youthful looks and youthful wages. When a woman has been employed for many years there comes a time when most managements feel embarrassed at paying her peanuts . . . the problem is simply solved — get rid of her.

But fear not, women of the middle ages, your gallant lady knight has solved, by magic, your cruel predicament!

Or so it seems, for on the one hand she makes the point very clearly that the ageism we





Easy Does It

Betty Lockwood, chairman (sick) of the Equal Opportunities Commission, has been made a life peer. For services rendered... to whom? Judge for yourself with this roundup of recent achievements.

★ The EOC has concluded that Tameside Local Education Authority was not contravening the Sex Discrimination Act, although one third more boys than girls were given places at selective grammar schools in 1976. That year – because of Tameside's undignified, last-minute scramble to reverse the comprehensive plans there – there were only two selected school entries, one co-educational and one for boys only. The EOC were satisfied that the applications to the co-ed school were dealt with 'without regard to sex', and indeed 99 girls, as opposed to 59 boys, were accepted. But the girls could not apply to the boys' school. Now, as single sex schools aren't covered by the SDA, there was no illegal sex discrimination, even though in Tameside's school system there were 76 more selective school places available to boys

face is almost unsurmountable and the next thing SPLAT! she's caught the fly and stamped it into the ground.

How? You might well ask! Basically it amounts to selling your business to the press, to the ageful but jobless and to the ageist and potentially jobful bosses. There are two things to remember...

1 There is a serious problem and Ms Sykes is doing something about it.
2 She's no charity and her goal is money.

The press conference I attended was rather like a cross between the launching of a new charity and a kids' party complete with a mask to take home! We were supposed to wear them to disguise our ages.

Well Ms Sykes, for I know you're reading this, I admire your determination and enthusiasm but with statements like "Why don't people discriminate against overweight? That's far more reasonable than age", I'm not sure I admire your philosophy. □

Elizabeth Wyse

than to girls. An LEA can't be caught out by its overall provisions – it can discriminate in its allocation of resources and places as much as it likes, as long as it favours boys *single sex* schools. It's a great Act.

★ One of the EOC's more useful recent activities was the publication of a consultative document on 'Income Tax and Sex Discrimination'. Liberally illustrated with letters of complaint or enquiry, it spells out the discriminatory workings of the present tax laws.

A recurring complaint from married women is that the Inland Revenue persists in treating them as though they do not exist, by stating on the tax forms that "if you are a married woman living with your husband he should complete the form as if it were addressed to him".

This document explains how the tax system favours married couples who are taxed jointly. If either does not go out to work, the man gets a larger personal allowance – that is, amount of income that is not taxed – than a single person. If both go out to work they get a larger allowance than two single people – they get the equivalent of a married man's allowance and a single person's allowance, £2400 in all as opposed to £1890 untaxed.

But even if the woman goes out to work and the man does not, the responsibility for paying their tax still rests on the man. This means that the husband is entitled to know how much his wife earns, but he is not obliged to tell her how much *he* earns. Worse, any tax rebates given on either income automatically go to him.

Married couples can choose to be taxed separately – an advantage if they earn a lot as they avoid having to pay higher rates of tax. However, allowances for their children are still automatically set against the man's income tax.

The EOC outlines various options for change in the tax laws. Since their final recommendations are likely to be taken fairly seriously, it would be worth studying the report and sending comments on it

to the EOC.

Available free from EOC, Overseas House, Quay Street, Manchester.

★ Betty Lockwood has publicly admitted that the crawl towards equal pay for women has come to a halt. From 1970 to 1976 women's gross hourly earnings rose from 63.1% to 75.1% of men's because of the Equal Pay Act; but in the last year they have only risen to 75.5% of men's. This cannot come as much of a surprise to her. The EPA is concerned with establishing equal pay for the same job. But men and women do not in general *do* the same jobs – women tend to jobs that are unskilled, because it is harder for women to get professional training or apprenticeships, and because they usually put a lot of time and energy into bringing up children while men of the same age are working to improve their job prospects. Professional associations and trade unions alike seem determined to maintain pay differentials between the unskilled and the skilled.

The largest pay rises this year have gone to the skilled. So for every woman who successfully brings an equal pay case before an industrial tribunal, others – in their traditional women's jobs – are falling behind men who are more highly skilled and organised.

Few firms are going out of their way to improve the status of women, according to an EOC study: only 39% of the firms they asked could even say how many women they employed... and only 5% were doing *anything* to try to improve opportunities for them.

★ A group of Labour women MPs are pressing Home Secretary Merlyn Rees to make the EOC fight harder for women's rights. As Audrey Wise (Coventry SW) points out, the EOC has only twice used its powers to investigate cases of alleged discrimination (the second such investigation, at Electrolux, still drags on) and has never issued a single 'non-discrimination' notice. By relying on behind-the-scenes persuasion, the EOC has failed even to make clear where and how discrimination is practised.

★ No code of practice on pay and opportunity has yet been produced, only 'guidelines' for what Betty Lockwood calls "busy managers and trade union officials (who) have had to come to terms with a great deal of complicated legislation affecting the work place over recent years". How very considerate! All is clear in a letter about this draft booklet from EOC Commissioner Philip Jones to the CBI: "You will note that it is to be published in the form of guidance rather than a code of practice. I am glad to be able to tell you that this is to a great extent due to CBI influence on the EOC." □ JN, AP, RW
See SR 60 for a feature on the "Wasted Opportunities Commission"

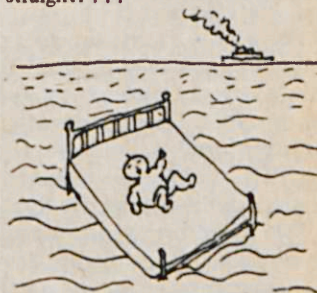


* The Jockey Club – the top brass who control racing in Britain – has, after a mere 225 years, admitted its first women members (nothing will ever be the same again?)...

* But the Kennel Club doggedly keeps women at bay. Florence Nagle, an 83-year-old dog-breeder, has failed in her attempt to challenge the Club's all-male membership rules; she's now considering legal action under the Sex Discrimination Act. Incidentally, it was Ms Nagle who in 1966 forced the Jockey Club to let women hold licences as trainers...



* Reclaiming our heroines... Richard Gordon, who wrote the 'Doctor in the House' sexist romp series, is bringing out a new novel starring Florence Nightingale as lesbian. "Her letters say she shared the beds of countesses and cow-girls," Gordon explains, "and that 'no woman could excite passion in other women' like her. Her whole mentality was a lesbian one, which is part of the reason she was so successful." Descendants and biographers were shocked at the suggestion – "preposterous, she was absolutely dedicated to her work" – and the Royal College of Nursing defended her 'virtue' to the *Daily Mail*, saying she was a "great Victorian lady... Some of her notes on basic nursing are still valid today". So she must have been straight?...



* Baby-size waterbeds are the latest invention for premature babies suffering from 'apnoea' – dangerous episodes in which they literally stop breathing. American pediatricians reckon this may be caused by lack of time for learning to move in the womb – a waterbed could provide womb-like stimulation. It's designed so that small waves can pass through it – 12 per minute to simulate the rhythm of the mother's breathing. From tests so far they say it seems to work... JN

MORE NEWS PAGE 30 →

LESLEY RUDA

Changing Childcare

In Spare Rib 66 Marsha Rowe looked at the ways women in collective households in Leeds, Manchester and London were trying to share childcare more equally between parents and non-parents. One woman she spoke to described childcare as "a fine, exciting, volatile mixture of love and housework". In this article Marsha focusses on how men approach this combination of practical and emotional tasks:

A man friend of mine recently put his long thin hands up in the air, and stretching his arms wide, said he and the woman he lives with went as far apart as that, and his flung arms stretched even further, when she was pregnant. Then his hands rested together again as he described their return to closeness when the baby was born. They were together in a daze of wonder at the birth of their baby for three months and then he began again to feel very apart and alone. He experienced the woman's breastfeeding the baby as a painful exclusion. There seemed to be an emotional electricity between her and the child, a physical unity, about feeding and waking. He saw all this as a wrapping around them that was like a recreation of the womb. She and the baby were unreachable and untouchable, absorbing each other in an "emotional sac". He nearly left her and the baby.

The summer came bringing the sun and heat and he and the woman rediscovered their sexual love and came close. Still he felt daunted by the current of emotional energy between the woman and the child. He determinedly set to work on what he calls the "substructure" of childcare. He learned about feeding the baby, charted a timetable for what had to be done every day, changing nappies, and shopping. He felt less excluded.

Two years have gone by and his time in childcare is equal with the woman's but its quality has remained different. With him the child expects to be picked up and played with, and to do things. When the child is sad, sick or feeling quiet, the child goes to the woman. He has watched himself unwittingly encourage this split.

Fighting shy of feelings

My experience, as well as that of many of the women I spoke to, is that men involved in collective childcare share this sort of detachment. The men have entered the sphere of reproduction where there is an intermingling of emotional and practical work to be done. They are newcomers and it is strange for them, just as for the single women in the last article. They encounter the functions of wifehood or motherhood separated out into a range of visible, different tasks—the emotional and physical caring for children,

the housework, medical, and decision-making tasks. These skills, defined as the mother's in a nuclear family, become in a collective household everybody's to learn. They are, however, skills generally expected of women, and the men are often shy of them. The men are inclined to busy the children with activities of diversion rather than to delve deeper into feelings. They are more likely to seek practical causes for problems than to look into the actual relations between the adults and children. It is as if they, like my friend, feel it is the "substructure" they are able to familiarise themselves with, as if they are happier with the externally tangible and the concrete.

Tim, who lives in a Leeds collective where he helps care for two children, talked about the situation at breakfast time, when the children played with their Weetabix like toys. He was discussing conflict between children and adults but he did not recognise the contradiction he was caught in—he was responsible for seeing to the children's breakfast without feeling able to assert a parent's authority over the children's unruliness. Instead his response was to joke about his irritation and criticise the packaging of the Weetabix: "Silly things, like allowing the children four Weetabix. It's the design of the packet, because the crumbs go all over the floor and it's incredibly expensive too. When I come down in the morning I have to sweep it all up. Sometimes I deliberately leave it, as people will tell you." He felt he needed to construct his own relation to childcare which did not threaten to dissolve his identity as a man, to exist in a world of visible, manoeuvrable objects, so that when something went out of gear he could lift up the bonnet and set to with the spanner. He kept at a certain distance from the inter-relations of people and children in the house, from demands which might intrude and overwhelm him.

A more exciting time with men

Men approach collective childcare with a particular conscientiousness, as a task to be tackled and solved by planning as if, having accepted childcare as work, they must work at it. Some women felt that as a result children had a more exciting time with men than with women. Alison observed how, in her Leeds household,



the men were not content to sit around in the house with the children, but went out of their way to discover adventures and activities for them: "Men tend to do things with kids and women tend much more to muddle through the day, neither having a good time themselves, nor the kid having a good time, just with the kid on their knee. I'm not sure what causes it but I've noticed it."

Caroline, from a different Leeds collective, saw the cause some men's reluctance to take housework seriously—they would do the minimum and tidy with a flourish but forget the dust in the corners. They would cook with an enthusiasm which flagged at the clearing up: "Men don't think of cleaning out the dustbins or the plughole, the little bits left after the washing up." So for her there remained a sexual division of labour: "It fell on women to do a lot of the incidental work with the kids. When it was the men's turn it wasn't going to the laundrette or clearing out their rooms so the kids preferred being looked after by the men."

Men are slow to understand and participate in the organisation of shopping, cooking and washing which is behind the smooth running of a house. Tim said he remembered to wash the children's clothes on the evening he put them to bed: "I just bung their clothes in the washing machine after I've changed them, and it all gets washed." But he realised that it was the women in the house who had the overall responsibility: "In fact, I don't do the organising of the clothes for the next morning, or put clothes away." This responsibility extended to "hidden things" which he "in common with other men" tended to notice less. An example was whether the children needed new shoes. Or, in Alison's house, she thought the men were often unnoticing "if a child's clothes are absolutely filthy".

Men's approach to childcare often shows an insecurity about the emotional aspects. When they bypass children's needs for comforting and reassurance or talks about dreams in the night, when they translate tears into requests for biscuits, milky drinks or stories, they are forgetting the sort of nurturing and encouragement children need, and which the men themselves have received and continue to receive from women. Until they recognise that

they need and get this support from women, they are unlikely to recognise that children need it, and that men (as well as women) can give it. They can fluff their feathers up in self-importance about their contribution to childcare, but suppressing this recognition of emotional support can also make them forget the interdependence of people in a house.

"Men make such a meal of it"

Alison thought that women were more fluid in helping each other out, in coping with turnabouts in events, whereas men could become flustered by changes of plan: "The men are much more rigid about arrangements while the women are more adaptable. If a man said he'd look after a child from 2 to 4pm that would be it. If you asked him to go out to the shop while you are looking after a child, there would be a fuss." Childcare seems to require their exclusive concentration, and they can become aloof towards other adults around: "The men seem much less capable of doing anything else while looking after a kid. They make such a meal out of it—I have got this kid therefore I am not washing up, cooking a meal, talking to people." Tim talked about an opposing tendency, which was the temptation to "dump the kids in front of the telly" and carry on with his own work. This was "evaluating your contribution in terms of time on the rota rather than in terms of your relationship with the children."

Although men may give their attention to external things to be done for children and blinker themselves to inner experience, and although they may feel inadequate about this and defensively stress the quantity of the childcare they do when questioned on its quality, they do acknowledge how the presence of children changes their lives and talk about a deepening sense of community coming from sharing childcare. When Tim moved into his collective house he particularly wanted to become more relaxed with children, to transform his "social embarrassment" and "unnatural, very uptight feelings" with them into something new. It seemed

Changing Childcare

an artificial division to him to "spend a lot of time working out adult relationships, sexual or otherwise" and not to be similarly involved with children, "except in the way of doing creches every so often and that's not seriously relating to kids." The result has been a "far more intense living situation" and a "much stronger commitment to the household than to previous collectives where he has lived. Yet although his feelings were deep when he described the household he emphasised its function as a place of work—reproductive labour—involving people and planning, and underrated the emotional side: "I think a lot of the relationships between the adults are very much based on the kids. It is a corporate relationship rather than individual relationships. I think a lot of the individual relationships are not necessarily that good, but corporately it seems to work." He saw himself as a learner—"When I moved in I knew nothing about kids and said if people saw me doing something wrong they should say so, which was just the way I wanted to cope with it"—and as a fairly confident one because he invited criticism and teaching. He was aware of the need to give support in times of confrontation between adults and children without taking over: "If someone is unconfident you would not intervene because he needs to cope with it himself."

Fathers and exclusiveness

Women who form sexual relationships with men who are fathers have a particular experience of men's approach to childcare. Women who previously helped with children in collectives, like Jodie in Manchester, are already aware of the complexities of relationships between parents and non-parents; they are more experienced with children themselves, and there more likely to see

their relationship with a man as separate from any relationship to his child. Women who have not been involved with children before, like Annie and Ellie in Leeds, or myself, are more likely to rush in and act on a spontaneous desire to help out with the childcare, and less prepared for the problems which come up.

The men's relationship with their children is often solitary. They don't share the time they spend with their children with other adults. They are like single fathers. The relationship develops a private intensity whereby the man is carrying out a commitment to doing his share of childcare but is isolating himself and the child at the same time. Annie commented on her lover's relationship to his child as "incredibly close". She said, "The negative word I would use would be claustrophobic and the positive word would be incredibly loving and close. I think both poles come into it." So that, whereas some women have stressed the significance of counteracting exclusive parental relationships by sharing childcare, the men who are fathers have perhaps encouraged it. When a father forms a new sexual relationship this emotional exclusiveness becomes a problem. The children are often quick to express jealousy when the men and the women are together, while the men are slow to recognise their possessiveness and sit back hopelessly in a sort of agony of delight at being the centre of attention. Jodie noticed that her lover's daughter was "always making some excuse about how she's hurt herself, and where's a plaster", and Ellie noticed that Sam's response swung between plunges into aggression and assertions of love: "He'd wake up every couple of hours and get into bed with John and me and pinch me all over, or complain there wasn't enough room, or tell John how much he loved him." The men seemed to beam attention exclusively on the women or exclusively on the children. Their individual focussing produced a competitive couple formation. A woman's attempt to shift this and also form a relationship with his child needed the father's co-operation and willingness to stop provoking jealousy himself, to turn "either or" into "both".

Emotional division of labour

The way men restrain their own emotions often extended to children. They often reacted to a child's unhappiness with a subdued impatience, and tried to quieten the child. Annie thought that her lover George did not allow his daughter to "experience her own negative emotions". Men can be upset and frightened themselves when children express emotion, and feeling threatened, can resort to asserting their authority, whether it takes a stern or a conciliatory form: "Some days Teresa will wake up very angry, and you can see how George will hold it back by promising treats. He's taking over and trying not to let Teresa's emotions come out, so that in the end you have a really irritable child, rather than an angry one. And George just gets upset." Trying to change the men's attitudes often provoked a hurt hostility. The men conceded their defensiveness under a mounting load of problems and pain. Childcare responsibilities became the rationale for their lack of understanding, as when Ellie was talking about her relationship with John: "In the bad times I have said he needs his child to be a problem because it takes responsibility away from himself to something external."

The men expect understanding and sympathy from the women. This brings into relief their own difficulties as fathers in understanding their children's emotional needs, and also their reluctance as men to give women emotional support. Jodie's lover worried more about growing apart from his children than about childcare responsibilities, but this too became a reason for the imbalance Jodie felt in their sexual relationship: "What tends to happen is that I can't really go to him very much for emotional support because he's so obsessed with the thing with the kids, but he comes to me, over that." Annie described it as a "division of labour" that she still had to turn to "old friends" for all her emotional support. Although she thought that one relationship could not fulfil all of one person's expectations, she did expect some reciprocity: "By definition a relationship means expectations and demands." The men were likely to use childcare as an excuse for not trying to change, saying they were too overloaded to cope. The reaction Annie described was common: "He just translates any pain I have into his pain and I suppose that's a male thing. I am no longer the one with a problem and he's doubled his problems." ○

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LIBERATING THE VOICE

Sheila Miller

Describing the vocal workshop Frankie Armstrong runs in London without being able to demonstrate with a big sound is far from easy. Basically it aims to introduce people to the strong, open-throated style used in the Balkan countries.

The workshop is mixed, but mainly women have come to it. Much of Western music forces women to be quiet and restrained, and to sing in the sweet little voice considered 'ladylike'. It's a real revelation, when your musical education and whole upbringing have landed you within such narrow confines, to find that you can make a really loud, jubilant, powerful noise, and it's not surprising that many women from the Women's Liberation Movement have attended the workshop.

The Balkan technique allows the voice to be loud and strong enough to carry over long distances in the open without damaging the throat. It's very much like the voice in which chain gang songs and shanties are sung, and many traditional singers—especially those of gypsy background—have elements of this style.

The old music hall performers too used a similar technique. With halls holding up to 3000 people, powerful singing was necessary, but it had to sound natural, and conversational, not operatic as this would have been out of place in music hall.

What all these styles have in common is that the singer relies on having a relaxed throat and not using too much effort or breath—particularly important in work-songs, where all available breath and effort is needed for the work. But it is excess effort that should be avoided, not energy; there's a lot of energy in the Balkan style. The sound is clean, and edgy—some find it rather harsh and others exhilarating.

I should say before I go on that this is merely one way of singing, not suitable for every song. It depends partly on personal taste: I for one detest the plummy, artificial tones of most opera singers, and the thin reedy voices in which girls are taught to sing.

The process Frankie uses to help people find this voice was developed by American singer Ethel Raim, who leads a seven-woman group, the *Pennywhistlers*. After years of devotion to Eastern European music and frustration at failing to produce the same sound, Ethel evolved a system whereby, instead of attempting the 'Balkan voice' at one leap, you build up to it gradually, starting from a simple shout.

This is merely a loud "Hey!"—the sort of noise you might make if you saw someone disappearing down the street with your bag. From this you progress to a series of shouts, and then from a pitched, shouted "Hey!" to a sung "Hey"—a difference so slight that many people don't at first realise they are now singing, and revert immediately to their school choir voices.

But that goes with a bit of practice and some exercises—fairly simple sequences of notes, sung individually or by the group en masse. Sometimes we turn these phrases into short drones, each person holding on to the last note of the sequence while the next in the circle sings the whole phrase on top of this note. In some of these we deliberately use harmonies in seconds, a discordant sound to Western ears. Once over the initial shock, it's an exciting sound to listen to, and even more so to make.

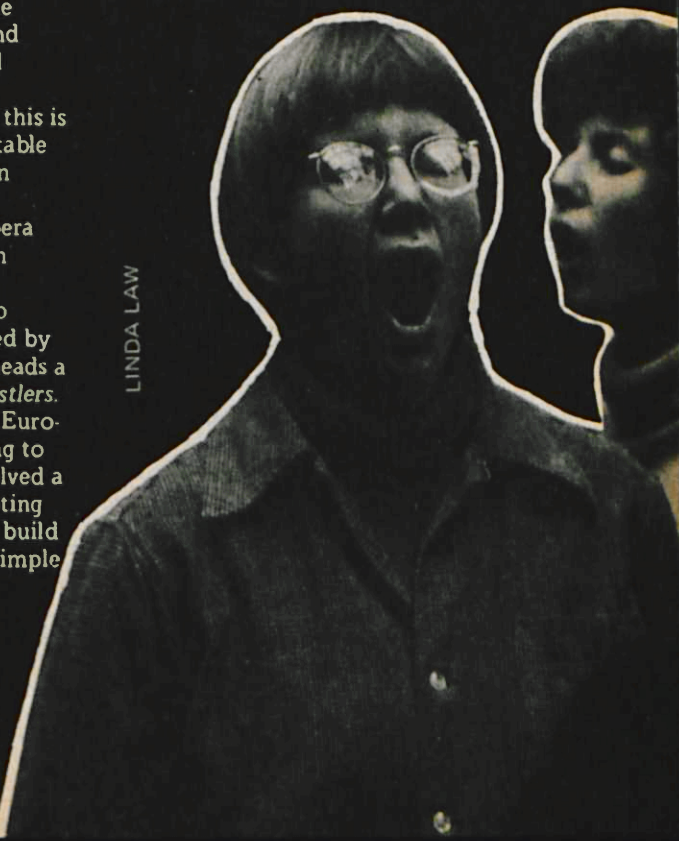
Then there is the upper register, the head voice. This is a kind of strong falsetto, and comes into play when you reach the top of your range in the lower register, which is likely to happen somewhere between top B and top F for women, and at a slightly lower pitch for men. We do the exercises for this range in an "ee" sound, simply because this seems to work better than the "a" vowel we use for the lower range.

A great thing about the workshop is its flexibility. Exercises can be adapted to the interests, talents and needs of those present, and any number can join in, though the best is between ten and twenty: beyond that there's a slight loss of momentum because of the time it takes to go round the group, giving everyone a go at the exercises.

Our weekly sessions last about two hours; this allows a fairly thorough workout, with time to concentrate on individuals, and then time to learn a song later.

When Frankie began the workshop two years ago, she was in charge of the sessions, with help from Brian Pearson, who

LINDA LAW



LIBERATING THE VOICE

stood in when she was away. About a year ago she found this took up too much of her time, so those of us who'd been going all along started a rota, with Frankie taking the sessions twice and the rest of us once each.

Literally hundreds have attended the workshop; most have got something out of it. For some it's a start on the road to singing; for some it's the pure enjoyment of making a loud noise; for some it's an expression of strength, or of joy; for others, a realisation, a breakthrough in confidence.

As a young woman whose singing had been criticised and ridiculed at school said, "That teacher was doing a lot more to me than just telling me I didn't have a good voice, because my voice was part of me."

Perhaps this is one reason so many people find the workshops fulfilling—it's not really about learning something new, but about reclaiming something. Frankie considers singing to be "one of the most basic forms of expression. Kids all sing before they're ever formally taught to. There's even an anthropological theory that singing or chant came before speech, as an attempt to mimic birds and animals or to coordinate work." And she thinks that "the things that most people really enjoy are things that make them feel more alive, more connected to others. Singing this way is a process of taking layers away, of un-learning. Unless someone actually has some physiological damage to their voice-box, or is very severely curtailed in their breathing, there's no reason they can't produce some really exciting sounds. That's a physiological fact; the things that get in the way are psychological, learned things."

Frankie, almost blind herself, is interested in applying the techniques of the workshop to the disabled; this would be a form of release for people who, because of some handicap, can't work out tension physically. She has already introduced the concept to several partially-sighted people and to some occupational therapists. One teacher has been doing work on it with her seven and eight year old pupils, and has found that some of the shyer children have started opening out.

We've all been amazed to find how wide the influence of the voice is. Just by knowing one can make these sounds, many of us have become more confident. A bloke once tried to accost Frankie on a train. Instead of cowering in the corner as he probably expected her to, she shouted "Fuck off!" in what may well have been the loudest voice he'd ever heard. By the time the guard and conductor arrived, the would-be attacker had fled to the other end of the train. ●

The vocal workshop meets at 8pm every Thursday in the rehearsal room at Action Space, 16 Chenies Street, London WC1 (01-637 7664). We make no charge, but Action Space insists that everyone who attends a workshop there becomes a member of Action Space. Temporary membership (for one night) costs 25p, and membership for a year £2.

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN



The Leichhardt centre

"Dissatisfaction exploded into anger—we began to assume the right to control our own bodies." In the last four years health centres have sprung up all over Australia. Helen Grace, who lives in New South Wales, describes how they work.

When the first Women's Community Health Centre opened in Leichhardt, an inner Sydney suburb, in March 1974, the women working there were met by a long queue stretching into the street. The centre was overwhelmed by the demand for sympathetic help with contraception, abortion, vaginal infections and gynaecological problems—help not forthcoming from doctors who tended to be patronising, withheld information and simply regarded women's health as a trivial issue.

Since then similar centres have started in most states. Most are feminist in orientation and emphasise 'health' rather than 'illness', using approaches ranging from straight medical care to paramedical care and natural medicine. They are staffed by women who are doctors, nurses, counsellors and by women who have no formal qualifications but have skills through their experience as women and their work in the centres.

Women using the centres are encouraged to learn about their own bodies; for

example they'll be shown how to use a speculum and encouraged to take it with them, not as an alternative to regular check-ups but as part of the learning process and so that they can begin to take responsibility for their own health instead of leaving it in the hands of 'experts'.

The centres have encouraged research into abortion techniques and keep a close watch on clinics which do terminations. Critical of many of these, they hope to establish one themselves. Research is also in progress on IUDs, vaginal infections, premenstrual tension and nutrition. Women can also get information on social services, housing and the law—answering enquiries and referring is an important part of the centres' work.

Funding

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Australian health centres is the funding system. Most are government funded and are part of the Federal government's community health programme established by

WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTRES



Help yourself to massage—Leichhardt

the Labour government which was in power from December 1972 to November 1975. Then, in the most serious constitutional crisis in Australian history, a conservative government came to power. Vast cuts in public spending mean that the future of the women's health centres is now uncertain, particularly since the disastrous defeat for Labour in December '77's elections.

In the Australian women's movement there has been much discussion about government funding because of the political problems it involves. Accepting government money has placed centres at the mercy of demands to conform—these vary from state to state; some have attached impossible conditions to their grants.

In 1975 the government made available large sums of money in the name of International Women's Year. The IWY secretariat had two million dollars to fund projects but the money flow ceased at the end of the year, placing rape crisis centres, women's refuges and other projects in jeopardy.

In September '77 the health centres

were informed that the Federal government would in future provide only 75% of operating costs and 50% of capital costs. (Previously the Federal government provided 90% of operating costs and 75% of capital costs.) The health centres now have to somehow extract the rest of the money from the state governments.

This change in funding represents a massive cut though there has been no public announcement about it. The centres have yet to see what share of regional health funds they'll be allocated for 1978; even further cuts are possible and the centres will have to struggle harder than ever.

All this takes place in a time of high unemployment and inflation, and amidst continual discussion within the women's movement about the effectiveness of the health centres.

How did it all start?

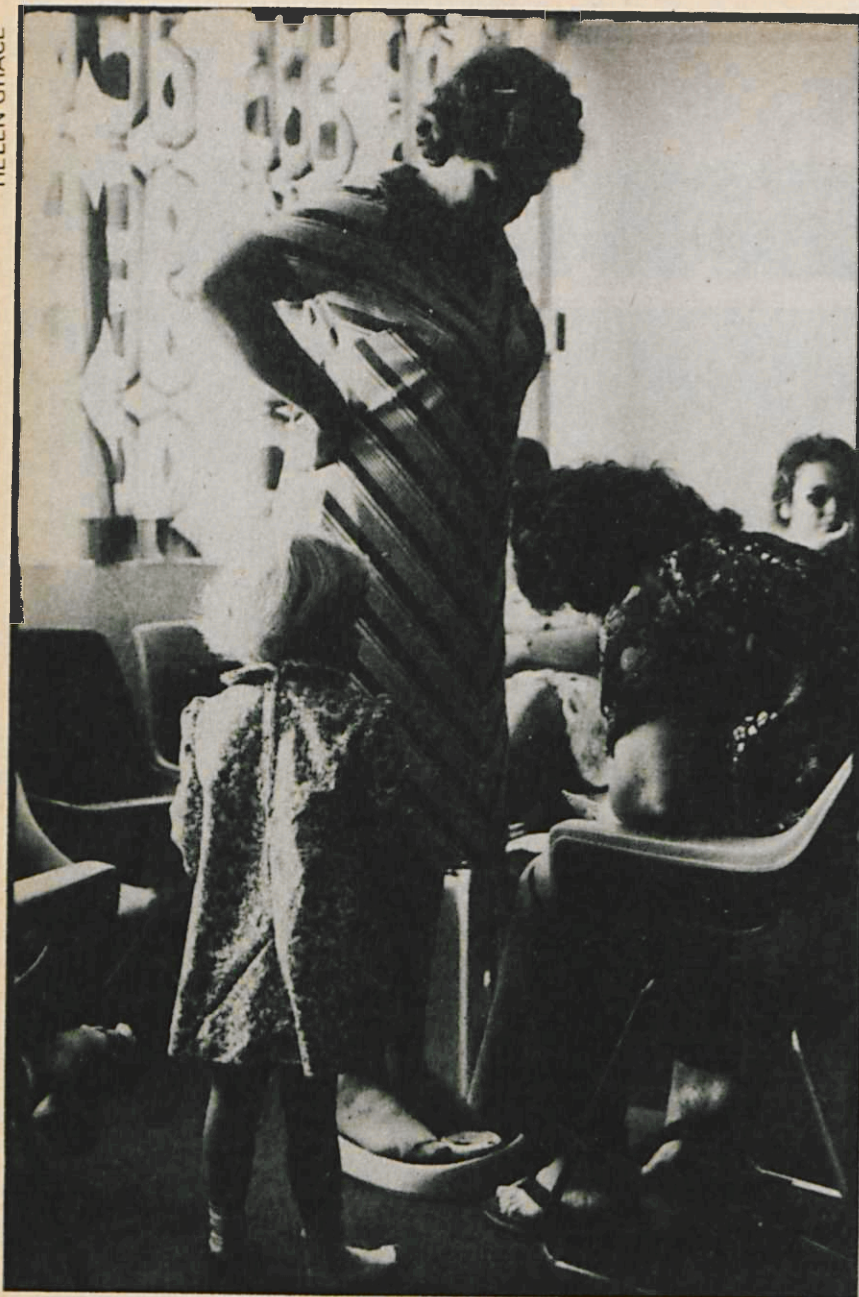
In March 1973, several hundred women attended a Women's Liberation commission in Sydney. The subject of women's health

came up repeatedly as women spoke of their dissatisfactions—doctors who refused contraception and abortion, imposing their own moral standards; women told there was nothing wrong with them or that they should put up with vaginal infections and menopause symptoms; women treated for psychiatric illness because they persisted with their complaints. Dissatisfaction exploded into anger; we began to assume the right to control our own bodies.

Leichhardt (Sydney)

When a proposal for a health centre for the women of Sydney was approved by the Federal Minister of Health, a group of women drew up a budget, advertised for staff and began the search for premises. In March 1974, the Leichhardt centre opened in an area with a large population of migrants, working people and students.

The centre is to some extent seen as the health centre for Sydney feminists; this is a problem for the collective who want it to be for *all* women but with a feminist perspective. The centre is open four weekdays; most nights are taken up by group



"Fat and happy? Bet you're not!"—Liverpool

Adelaide

meetings and individual appointments. One weekday is set aside for the collective meeting and a skill-sharing session. Job division is minimised and all the women do Pap smears and pregnancy testing, share phone-answering and cleaning.

At the end of October 1976 and again in July 1977 they closed their doors for days of intensive discussion about the direction they were taking. The women don't want simply to be a service—which they are to some extent—but a pressure group working for real social change. They spend a lot of time visiting schools, universities, hospitals and so on to talk about their work and politics. As they say, "Pressure is on us to treat women's health care as an absolute priority above feminism and collectivity. We cannot help but see these three things as inextricably bound. We believe that women's health is a priority because for too long, the knowledge of women's bodies has been centred in the hands of male scientists. As feminists, we want women to be able to take control of their own bodies. But control of one's body is a meaningless concept in view of the hierarchical power structures of our patriarchal society—hence collectivity."¹

In April 1974 a group of Adelaide women requested a health centre there, after one had visited the Leichhardt centre. Seven months later they were told their submission had been successful, but this was just the beginning of an exhausting struggle with the state government to get the money the Federal government had approved. Until receipt of the first cheque in October '75, the group experienced obstruction from state bureaucrats who didn't like the idea of women working together with government money. At the end of '74 an 'administrator' was appointed, then a 'researcher' and a 'social worker' (we use quotation marks because conventional division of labour doesn't apply at most health centres; jobs overlap). At first the women worked without wages.

Premises were another problem. They found a house in need of renovation in Hindmarsh, a suburb, and while working on that, set up a temporary health centre in one woman's home. In February '76 the centre was officially 'opened' by Don Dunstan, Labour Premier of South Australia—by then the state government was keen to get credit for the work the centre was doing.

Liverpool (Sydney)

It was soon clear that the Leichhardt centre wasn't enough for the whole of Sydney. About a third of the women who went there lived in the western suburbs, and many came from country areas. In April '75 a centre opened in Liverpool, 20 miles from Sydney in the sprawling western suburbs, a heavily industrial area with an acute shortage of doctors.

The Liverpool centre works collectively, with everyone, including the doctor, on the same salary. Many women who use the centre are process workers in local factories; their pay is low, conditions bad and job-related diseases common. So the centre has an industrial health group, concerned not simply with health. Many local women are migrants, needing help with language and legal problems. Though most are unionised they rarely see a union official, so the industrial health group helps with compensation claims. Factory regulations on noise levels and safety precautions are inadequately enforced, so with union help the Liverpool women are trying to set up health and safety groups within the factories. They want to combat the attitude that health is an individual problem, rarely seen as job-related.

In view of this kind of work, it's hardly surprising that the centre had its budget slashed by one-third in '76.

The Leichhardt, Hindmarsh and Liverpool centres have in common limited job and wage differentiation, a collective structure and an emphasis on skill sharing to demystify medicine. The women there emphasise these features but also the problems they've had in practising all of them. For example, it has been difficult to find doctors prepared to work collectively and accept the same salary as the others.

Melbourne

The Melbourne health collective ceased working at the end of '75 after operating on a voluntary basis for 15 months in the inner-city suburb of Collingwood; over 3,000 women used the centre in that time. They got some funding from Collingwood Council and the Abortion Trust Fund but couldn't accept money approved by the Federal government because of the conditions attached to the grant by the state government.

The Victorian Hospitals and Charities Commission wouldn't accept their constitution because it was written in collective terms and they wouldn't accept the principle of no wage differentiation. The collective wouldn't agree to treating men, another condition demanded by the state. In New South Wales the centres agreed in principle to treat men on the grounds that it wouldn't be a problem in practice—men don't have vaginal infections or unwanted pregnancies, so would have no use for the centre. But the Melbourne collective felt more strongly about the principle.

Perth

After a long political struggle, the government ceased funding Perth Women's Health and Community Centre in September '76. The house is still open as a women's liberation centre and another centre, described by the Australian Women's Weekly as "a sort of Citizens Advice Bureau for feminine problems" is being funded by the State government.

Brisbane

Behind the Peanut Curtain in sunny Queensland, funds were refused to the already established Brisbane health centre and refuge—so the health centre had to close and the refuge now has to charge women to stay there. Queensland is the only state to oppose the federal programme to set up health centres and refuges. Queensland women have been forced to travel 700 miles to Sydney for abortions.

Darwin

In the far north of Australia, in Darwin, a women's health centre started in '75, after pressure from the local branch of the Women's Electoral Lobby. It's not just a health centre but, as in Brisbane, includes a women's refuge and drop-in centre. It's run by a board of six women and staffed from 8am-5pm, though volunteers keep it open beyond these hours. It's not quite a conventional health centre, nor is it very radical, but it does fulfil a community need and the women feel that if funds stopped there'd be enough local support to keep it going.

Darwin has a tropical climate with only two seasons a year. This affects the centre's work in that during the wet season women are more likely to find their domestic situation intolerable and seek outside support.

Newcastle

In Newcastle, the largest provincial city in Australia, the Working Women's Centre was established in '75. It doesn't see itself as "just another radical women's group seeking to encourage permissiveness and provide abortion on demand". In fact the group seems to want to dissociate itself

from the radical nature of women's health centres in general. I was unable to discuss the principles of collectivity and job and wage differentiation there.

Gosford

The newest health centre is at Gosford, on the New South Wales central coast and just north of Sydney. It has taken two years to set up and until August '77 relied completely on volunteers. The practice of involving volunteers is important because the Gosford group wants to encourage women to participate in the decision-making which affects their health and lives—they think this can be done better by working with volunteers than by appointing paid workers who are then seen as experts. With this in mind they advertised for a 'secretary' as their first paid worker, rather than a 'co-ordinator'. The centre currently runs groups on sexuality, weight control and yoga and there are training groups for volunteers. Other community groups like Friends of the Earth also hold meetings at the centre.

Outside the largest capital cities, women establishing health centres have had to deal with more conservatism, which limits their own radicalism, but centres in these areas at least introduce feminist ideas.

Opposition

The effectiveness of the women's health centres can be understood by looking at the sort of opposition they've received. Sections of the (conservative) Liberal Party regard them as "centres of socialism and extreme feminism". A member of the extreme, anti-feminist Women's Action Alliance put it like this: "Feminism is a health hazard. Ostensibly attempting to improve women's health through health collectives, feminist ideology obscures medical and scientific considerations because it denies that adherence to a moral code usually means better health. The great feminist commandment 'Thou Shalt Not Moralise' and feminist permissiveness in sexuality, smoking and drinking has led to an increase in venereal and gynaecological disorders and a lower life expectancy for women's libbers." 2

The Leichhardt centre has been attacked for its association with a handbook on sexuality, which shocked the Festival of Light by dealing with non-heterosexual and non-procreative sexuality.

Collectivity

All the centres have had to work hard at making the collectives function. Often, collective-working difficulties have overlapped the funding problems. As one woman explained it, "You have to learn to work collectively, it doesn't come naturally, and when you have to direct so much energy to fighting the bureaucrats, there isn't much left for supporting each other."

Others see it differently: "It is starting to worry some of us that trying to make the collective work is consuming too much of our energies. Collectivity is a post-

revolutionary method of organisation which we are trying to implement in a pre-revolutionary state."³

In spite of these difficulties, and the almost despairing admission that "it's a lot harder than you think it's going to be, even when you knew it was going to be harder than it sounded", the women's health centres have permanently changed the expectations of many Australian women. It is five years now since the commission which gave impetus to the demand for decent health care for women. Since then we have learned a great deal about our

bodies, about organising for change and working collectively. Most of the health centres are radical in their work, some are not, and there is always the risk that the government will at any point cease funding the centres. But it is already too late to stop the process which has begun. We know too much now.○

Footnotes

- 1 Kath McLean and Robyn Clarke in *Scarlet Woman*: issue on collectives, Feb '76
- 2 letter to editor, *Melbourne Age*, Sept 28, 1976
- 3 *Scarlet Woman*, Feb '76



Counselling in a crowded room—Liverpool

HELEN GRACE

SHORT LIST

INFORMATION TO ANNY BRACKX

27 CLERKENWELL CLOSE

LONDON EC1

TALKS AND CONFERENCES

The After-effects of Rape on the Raped Woman

27 January. 7.30 talk at the Women's Research and Resources Centre, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1 (01-253 7568). Speaker: Cathy Roberts (Rape Crisis Centre worker).

Women in Dickens' Novels

27 January. 7.00 talk organised by the Dickens Fellowship, in the Swedenborg Hall, 20-22 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1. Michael Slater talks about The Monstrous Regiment & The Sacred Sisterhood.

Women Artists

28 January. 2.00-5.00 meeting to discuss and plan the contribution of women artists to the next national women's liberation conference. At the Women's Centre, 76 Brighton Rd, Balsall Heath, Birmingham (021-449 2931). Creche.

Irish Women's Liberation Conference

28/29 January. In Dublin. For registration forms and further information write to the Planning Cttee of the Irish Women's Conference, c/o R Worvill, 35 Trinity College, Dublin 2.

Socialist Feminist National Conference

28/29 January. Sat at the Poly, Aytoun St, Manchester (also registration). Sun at UMIST, Manchester. Blockworkshops on socialist feminist practice and theory, the relation between socialist feminists and left groups, socialist feminists within the women's liberation movement, on Sat. Special topics and campaigns workshops on Sun. Ring 0204-44539 if you need a creche, and accommodation (bring sleeping bag). Register in advance with Lancaster Women's Centre, 86 King St, Lancaster (0524 63969). Fees: £2.00 unwaged and £2.50 others outside NW region. Add 50p if you're inside the region. Add another 50p if you're registering late.

Prostitutes Fight Back

30 January. 7.30 Women's Voice meeting at Stroud Green School, Ennis Rd, London N4. With representatives of the Programme for Reform of the Law on Soliciting

* Indicates publications are available from the Publication Distribution Co-op, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.

(PROS) speaking out against police harassment, prison sentences and fines. Details from Alison (01-251 3175).

Women and the General Strike 1926

3 February. 7.30 Feminist History Group talk at the WRRRC, as above. Speaker: Sue Bruley. Details from 01-622 4118. Women only.

Boys Rule not OK

3-5 February. National Association of Youth Clubs (NAYC) conference for girls between 15 and 21 at NAYC residential centre, Avon Tyrrell (New Forest), Hants. "The NAYC is the largest non-uniformed organisation for young people in the country, with a membership of more than 600,000 of which 200,400 are girls... The conferences (the second one is on 21-23 April at Manchester University) are part of an attempt to redress the balance of our male-oriented service." Workshops on health, education, sexuality, employment, the family; film about rape; women's theatre group; bop with women's band; also self defence, canoeing, motorbike riding... Creche. Cost £10. Apply to your Local Education Authority at County Hall, or your local Youth Cttee if you cannot afford the full cost. Individual women and women's groups can also sponsor girls. Contact Janet Hunt, NAYC, PO Box 1, Blackburn House, Bond Gate, Nuneaton, Warks (0682-61921).

The Reproduction of Capitalism, the Welfare State and Women
10 February. 7.30 talk at the WRRRC, as above. Speaker: Mary McIntosh (Essex Univ.)

Women, Low Pay, and the Unions
12 February. 10.30-4.30 socialist feminist educational in a series on the political economy of women. At St Anne's Hall, Venn St, London SW4. Creche. Details from 01-720 7316.

In Defence of the Arts

12 February. Conference around the wider implications of political, economic and bureaucratic censorship in the arts. There has been a previous conference which was called as a result of the NW Arts Association Management Council's decision to investigate NW Spanner's (theatre group) political bias, to see if they were suitable for financial subsidy. Details of venue from the Standing Conference of

the Arts, c/o The Drill Hall, Manchester Rd, Mossley, Ashton Under Lyne, Lancs (061-881 7845)

Pit-Brow Lasses

17 February. 7.30 Feminist History Group slide show and discussion at the WRRRC, as above. Introduced by Angela John.

What is Male Supremacy?

25/26 February. From 10.00 London region revolutionary feminist conference at Carlton Community Centre, Granville Rd, London NW6. Registration (£2.50; £1.50 claimants) and papers from 185 Aldborough Rd, Seven Kings, Essex. Creche; bring food. Details of venue etc from 01-836 6081.

National Women's Liberation Conference

Early April. In Birmingham. Suggestions about structure, and theme should be sent to the Birmingham Women's Centre, 76 Brighton Rd, Balsall Heath, Birmingham B12.

CAMPAIGNS

Picket 'Let Live'

25 January. 6.30 at the Town Hall, Mare St, E8, in protest against Hackney Council giving large sums of money to 'Let Live', an anti-abortion counselling agency for young girls. Organised by NALGO Action Group and supported by Hackney socialist feminists.

Maureen Colquhoun Picket

25 January. Picket organised by the Maureen Colquhoun Action Cttee, outside Transport House, Smith Sq, London SW1, where the full National Executive of the Labour Party will be meeting to consider the Appeals Cttee's recommendation that Maureen be reinstated. Contact MCAC (01-624 6364) for time.

Two Years on from the Sex Discrimination Act

Worthing (Sussex) women's group is putting on an exhibition at the local library in February on the general theme of women's rights and if there's been any progress since the SDA. They want to display samples of literature from as many women's groups as possible to show what's been going on round the country. Send newsletters, leaflets, posters etc to Worthing women's group, Ashdown Community Centre, 6-8 Ashdown Rd, Worthing, Sussex.

Housewives Non-Contributory Invalidity Pension

Introduced in November last year, this new scheme grossly discriminates against disabled married (and co-habiting) women. To qualify for HNCIP a married disabled woman has to prove not only that she is incapable of paid employment, but also that she is not capable of "normal household duties". It is therefore assumed that all

married women are housewives, whether or not they are in charge of domestic work; it is also yet again assumed that they are their husbands' dependents. People from concerned organisations are gathering information for a report on the difficulties of women claiming HNCIP. Irene Loach at the Disability Alliance, 5 Netherhall Gdns, London NW3 will be collating replies and wants to hear from anyone, who has had experience of claiming this new pension.

International Women's Day

4 March. Keep the day free for a women only march and celebration.

Centres

Hornsey

The centre at 147 Archway Rd is closing; "although there were plenty of women interested in coming along to occasional meetings, the small group who arranged the meetings, wrote the newsletter etc, ran out of energy to keep the place going."

Lewisham

74 Deptford High St, London SE8 (01-692 1851). New opening hours: Mon 1.00-4.00, Tues & Thurs 11.00-4.00. Collective meetings are on alternate Mon afternoons at 1.30 and Wed evenings 8.00. Write to the centre to check. All women welcome.

Norwich

c/o 47 Wellington Rd, Norwich, Norfolk (0603 610854). Open Tues 7pm-9pm, Thurs 11am-12pm, Sat 9am-12am. It's a room in the local Community Arts Centre. The collective running it are concentrating on free pregnancy testing and advice/support to women. They also publish a newsletter and want to share their experiences with other groups.

Paris

New women's house: Maison des Femmes, 58 Rue Saint-Sabin, 75011 Paris.

PLAYS

Women's Theatre Week

At the Oval House, 54 Kennington Oval, London SE11.

25 January. 7.45 *She Asked For It* by Counteract. A play challenging popular myths about rape, through the experiences of individual women and their treatment by the press, police and courts. Details of future performances from Debbie (01-251 4977).

26-28 January. 7.45 *Pretty Ugly* by the Women's Theatre Group. It's about the problems created for teenagers by the images thrust upon them from the adult world.

29 January. 7.45 *Clapperclaw* sing

socialist, feminist satirical songs.

Voices

Susan Griffin's play about four women going over the changes in

their lives.

25-29 January and 31 January-5 February. 8.00 at the ICA, The Mall, London SW1. Adm £1.50.

Gay Times Festival

Until 5 February. At the Drill Hall, 16 Chenies St, London WC1. The last two weeks of the festival presented by the men in Gay Sweatshop and based on their play *As Time Goes By*. From 24-29 January, the 1920s and 30s will be focussed on, with talks on Lytton Strachey, gays and the media, films and performance of the German section of *As Time Goes By*. 31 January-5 February concentrates on the 60s and 70s, with plays on fascism, the American section of *As Time Goes By*, talks, films, cabaret and dance. Detailed programme from the Drill Hall (01-637 7664).

New Portuguese Letters

4/5 and 11/12 February. 5.30-6.30 dramatised reading of the writings of the Three Marias, given by Caroline Hutchison, Cecily Hobbs and Natasha Morgan. At the Riverside Theatre, Crisp Rd, W6.

The Working Women's Charter Show

18 February. Broadside Workers Theatre in a benefit performance for the purchase of a house for the Southampton women's centre. The play will be followed by a discussion, Sandra Kerr, and a social evening. Details of venue etc, from June Mitchell (0703 444196).

FILMS

Women's Cinema

A season of Hollywood films, illustrating the way women have been depicted by the major American film studios. These will be supplemented and contrasted by films made by women. Membership £1; 60p adm; women only. 29 January. 2.30 at Covent Garden Cinema Club, 29 King St, London WC2. Independent women's filmmakers programme. 5 February. 2.30, as above. *Solid Gold Cadillac* (56) with Judy Holliday. 19 February. 2.30, as above. *The Ballad of Josie* (67) with Doris Day.

Women's Films

18-24 February. A week of women's films organised by Thames Poly Women's group, as part of the Poly's annual film festival. At Thames Poly Students Union, Thomas St, London SE18. Details from 01-855 0618

Union Maids

Rank and File Films are touring the country with *Union Maids*, the *Right to Work* film trailer and a speaker (unemployed 17-year-old Andrea Earl from Tyneside). Details from Ann (01-802 0970).

PUBLICATIONS

* Undercurrents

Undercurrents, the alternative science and technology journal is planning to do a women and ecology/women and alternative technology issue. Any women who want to be involved in compiling or writing articles for this issue, get in touch with Rosemary Randall (01-267 1064), Lyn Simonson (01-267 5711) or send articles to *Undercurrents* (women's issue), 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1, before March.

How to Cope with the Law if you're not 100% Conventional Heterosexual

This is the title of a book which a group in Manchester are bringing out in the spring. It's a "survey of the law regarding anyone whose sexuality falls outside the conventional heterosexual norm—including transvestites, transsexuals etc. . . . It contains an extensive section on women and the law—lesbians, lesbian mothers and custody, women and sexual assault, prostitution, women's criminality . . . " The group is hoping to raise £700 in donations by April in order to keep down the cost of this essentially practical book. All contributions welcome. POs/cheques payable to 'Gay Rights Group', c/o Manchester Law Centre, 595 Stockport Rd, Manchester 13.

Domestic Violence Act

Rights of Women have produced an information sheet setting out the nature of the protection available to a woman cohabitee who has been granted an exclusion in-

junction. Available free from ROW, 2 St Paul's Rd, London N1 (01-359 6656). Send sae.

* Menstrual Taboos

Why are ladders unlucky? What's the big objection to women priests—and why was the Sabbath not "made for man"? Why should a naked woman run round the harvest fields in places as far apart as Italy and North America? Why would you find it easier to buy a trapeze on your holiday than a sanitary towel? Why do we paint our nails red? Why can't we have Mother's Day once a month instead of once a year? All the answers are in Pauline Long's terrific article. The rest of the pamphlet's for goddess-worshippers only, though. Available at 30p + postage from the Matriarchy Study Group, Flat 6, 15 Guilford St, London WC1.

Amanda Sebestyen

* Is it worthwhile working in a Mixed Group?

Maybe. This booklet describes very well all the old political struggles involved in the fight against the patriarchal system common to most mixed working situations. It also acknowledges that patriarchy is obvious in many "so-called socialist groups and societies". But it still doesn't recognise the fact that, as long as child-rearing remains the responsibility of the biological mother, feminists with children will find it exhausting to constantly fight patriarchy at work, and then go home to yet another job. There is only so much that the body, as well as the mind, can cope with. Written by Pauline Long and Mary Coghill (30p + postage). Mary Coghill and Diana Scott also wrote *If Women Want to Speak, What Language do they Use?* (40p + postage). Both are available from Beyond Patriarchy Publications, 31 Dalmeny Road, London N7. Carole Spedding

* Critique of Anthropology (Women's Issue)

I wouldn't recommend this to those just beginning to think about what anthropology offers the current feminist enquiry. Titles like 'The Search for Origins', 'Androcentrism in Marxist Anthropology', and 'Conceptualising

Women' may sound appealing but the papers are heavy. The purpose of this issue is to "evaluate the state of debate in marxist feminist anthropology"; this is achieved, with loving attention being paid to definitional problems and to the examination of the failings of existing theories. Their attempt to make this issue more accessible has failed—the papers neither outline basic ideas clearly for the general reader nor do they come up with any new ideas/approaches for those already involved in this area. Vol 3, Nos 9/10; £1.35 + postage. Available from PO Box 178, London WC1. Brenda Whisker

Anarcha-feminist Newsletter

Issue No 4 includes articles on organisation, leadership, "can therapy be revolutionary?", and reports of actions, and of the Northern anarcha-feminist conference, as well as comments on the women's festival workshop. 20p + postage (sub for 6 issues £1) from Sophie Laws, 43 Grosvenor Terrace, Bottham, York.

* New Internationalist

The October 77 issue was on women, and December 77 on childcare. The chatty "I was there" style of journalism is both the strength and weakness of this magazine. Very little of the material will cause offence to the committed feminist but neither will it provide many new insights. However, the information, which is readable and compact, can be used to stimulate discussion among the previously uninformed or unconvinced. As the material is drawn from many different countries the cultural bias towards the industrialised world which creeps into most discussions of women's liberation is lessened.

Gail Chester

* Women & Education

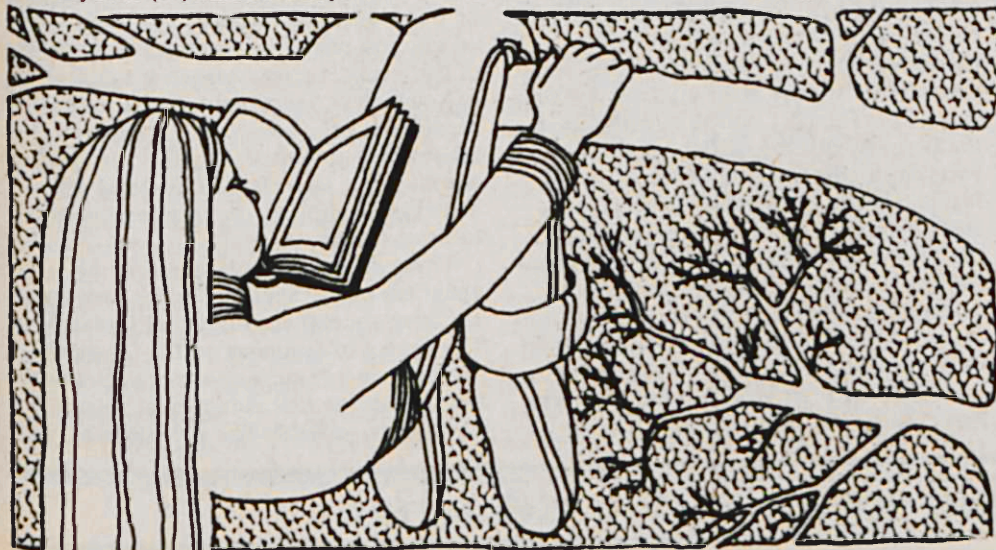
Issue 12 contains articles on fighting sexism in further education, girls leaving school, news on the EOC, and lots of reviews. 20p + postage (sub for three issues 60p) from 29 Corkland Rd, Charlton, Manchester 21.

Low Pay Unit

The Low Pay Unit has been regularly producing papers and pamphlets exposing the appalling working conditions and low pay workers (mainly women) have to put up with. Trades unions are weak in the low pay industries, and management often fails to pay the statutory minimum wage. In *From Rags to Rags* Steve Winyard investigates the clothing industry (75p + postage) and in *Short Back and Sides for the Poor* Ceri Thomas looks at what hairdressers pay their workers (50p + postage). Both available from the Low Pay Unit, 9 Poland St, London W1.

m/f

This new journal of feminist theory and politics, due out in February 1978, will attempt to develop the relevance of marxism and psychoanalysis to the women's movement. Subs (two issues) £2. Details from m/f, 11 Shamrock St, London SW4.



from Women & Education

Kor-BET



Jenny

is 23, lives in Sheffield, and teaches part-time in further and adult education.

Why join a revolutionary party? Why the Communist Party?

The basic reason any communist would give is that, in capitalist society, most women and men are exploited by a small, privileged ruling-class; and that we will only change that through a collective struggle to take political power ourselves. I joined the CP in particular for several reasons—its general strategy; its acknowledgement of the need for an autonomous women's movement (since women are oppressed by men and not just the ruling-class); and the increasingly open internal debate I knew was going on. I also thought it was the only broadly-based revolutionary party. I wasn't completely satisfied with the 'British Road to Socialism' (CP programme) . . . it was important to me that it is a strategy which aims to avoid armed violence, while recognising the need to use force under certain circumstances. I also thought the approach of linking different struggles, including fighting for a left majority in Parliament, genuinely got to grips with how people experience political activity now—as well as with how it might be transformed. But I wanted a clearer idea of how new kinds of political organisation could develop, based on mass involvement; and of how feminism could change communist practice.

However, that doesn't tell you what led up to my decision, nor how it felt. I can't collapse several unremarkable but full years into a couple of easy paragraphs. But in retrospect, two things mattered most. After school, I worked in France for a few months, with an organisation that was campaigning about housing; I helped organise playschemes. I began to see what it was like to live in a decaying prefab, or to be homeless; and to measure my own

Over the past couple of years, a number of feminists have joined left groups. No-one on the Spare Rib Collective belongs to a party, but we thought it relevant for two feminists, one living in Sheffield and one in London, to explain their decision and to describe how it has affected their lives. We do not intend to cover all left groups in this way, but hope that enough women will respond with their own experiences of joining parties, or their reasons for not doing so, to get a Spare Rib Forum page going.

Why I joined

powerlessness as an individual to do much about it. Then I went to university. I didn't settle down, particularly as it was Cambridge—not the predictable place for me to be, given parents who are neither well off nor intellectual, although they are in 'middle-class' jobs. I fled straight back into working on a local playground in my spare time. A community newspaper and cafe started in the area; I joined a women's group that met in the cafe, and found support and interest that cancelled out my previous nervousness about women's groups. Other things happened—I moved into a shared house . . . did women's studies as part of a social science course . . . got involved in the university nursery campaign—but it was through that first contact with community action, and then with women's liberation, that I began to gain confidence and political awareness. It also shaped what I wanted in a political organisation: the possibility of linking different kinds of people and activity seemed essential. The CP was one option I could investigate, through friends who were members, and through events like the Communist University.

I finally made up my mind in August 1975. I had just finished at university, and joined after moving to Sheffield a month later. It was hard to make the commitment on my own; I found myself looking to friends for approval—meanwhile they were carefully letting me make my own decision. One of the friends I moved in with joined the International Socialists; I had some battering arguments, until I learnt not to feel personally answerable for everything any Communist had ever done, and took the time to investigate for myself. I went to National Abortion Campaign and other women's movement meetings, where it took months to lose the feeling of being a superfluous outsider; especially having become 'a member of a left group'—I felt defensive. Party members I met were very friendly;

they had little contact with the women's liberation movement locally, but fortunately the one other active CP feminist in the city was in my branch.

CP membership here is large, notably among engineering workers. Around one third of the several hundred local members are women, often housewives and mothers with part-time paid jobs. Many women have difficulty getting to meetings and other events, especially when their husbands are also politically active. There have been separate CP women's group meetings here for years. Some women see this as compensation for everything else they miss; others see it, as I do, as a recognition of our need to work together and challenge sexism. There is tension as well as solidarity between feminist and non-feminist women, partly since our material situations often differ—what I say and do may be relevant, but the fact remains that I haven't got kids.

How active people are varies enormously. At first, I found it frustrating that other party members didn't automatically turn out for every meeting or demonstration I thought was important. Two years wearier, I think it makes sense for everyone to find their own level of activity, and vary it over time: there has to be room in a political organisation for people who work shifts, or who want to spend time with their kids, or who just can't face meetings every night of the week. My local branch is a mixture of housewives, industrial workers, teachers, pensioners, office workers . . . who are active trade unionists, who do a regular *Morning Star* sale, work in the local residents' association . . . or do several or none of those things.

Other feminists rarely question me about the party; Sheffield seems very unsectarian—or is that simply indifference? The impact of feminism on the CP shows, for instance in a more consistent attention to childcare, as well as in formal policy statements, on issues like gay rights or

“Sheffield seems very unsectarian

ed the C.P.

abortion. But it still shows much less in questions of organisation than questions of policy, despite the fact that the two are interdependent—it's easier to call for support for a NAC demonstration than to put positive discrimination into practice. There are still painful gaps; there has been very little CP involvement in the Sheffield Working Women's Charter campaign—an obvious area where the combination of feminist ideas and labour movement experience could have been effective.

Divisions created by the capitalist system, between men and women or workers and intellectuals, among others, have an effect. I know some of the industrial workers find me a divisive threat, or a nuisance (as a non-manual worker as well as a woman/feminist); I still feel tense when I go into the pub after a meeting, and find a group of them looking like Tetley Bittermen, with pints in their hands, and ready with the predictable jokes when I appear with my pint. I don't find it easy to talk about my own life with many party members; it still happens, for instance, that someone asks me if I'm 'courting', and I get as far as saying "no", that I live with a group of people . . . but dry up before managing to explain that I started having a lesbian relationship 18 months ago. (Let alone talking about the conflicts of leading a bisexual life, which I do, and which feels like enough of a taboo subject even in the Women's Liberation Movement). Yet there are also good and honest discussions; women's liberation attracts a lot of interest, precisely because it opens up 'personal' life to political discussions. Slowly, one or two unlikely men have taken the trouble to come and discuss sexuality, for instance; and in turn I've got an idea from them of how the labour movement works, or how the tenants' movement developed in Sheffield.

Sometimes weeks disappear in a blur of work and meetings, and I miss the play-

scheme work I was absorbed in 5 years ago, where the objectives were more limited, but results were more tangible. But my original reasons for joining the CP still hold. Perhaps I've begged more questions, in writing this, than I've answered; but I hope I've given some impression of what my experience has been.●

Elizabeth

is 41, lives in London, and teaches social work.

I have always been very aware of social differences, because in my childhood we were poor. True, it was genteel poverty—not as bad as living on social security, not as bad as living in Homeless Accommodation, not as bad as being a battered child. My parents were divorced and my mother lived on an allowance from my father which must have amounted to at least 150% of the then National Assistance levels, perhaps 200%. This income was further boosted because we lived with my grandparents in their house, which they owned. I was educated at a grand and academic public school, but we lived in a seedy, run-down neighbourhood and we had black neighbours, a source of shame to my mother. It was not so much that she was racist, but rather that nothing in her life had ever made her think of black people as anything but servants and 'natives', for she was an unfortunate legatee of the British Empire, left because of her divorce without status, money or qualifications, and with a set of attitudes that cut her adrift from the world she was living in.

In fact I made a daily journey through three different worlds. There was the exciting world of privilege, riches and intellectual glamour of school, where I never felt at ease, but was always on the outside; there was the then slummy world of West Kensington which lay between school and

home; and there was home itself, where I was encouraged to achieve (like a boy) yet where my mother's status as dependent and child (she smoked secretly in her bedroom because of her parents' disapproval), showed me in very raw terms that the life of a woman was a life of self-sacrifice and servitude, and that for a woman to be left without the means of economic independence was the greatest of all misfortunes. Above all my mother was ashamed of her position as a woman with a child but without a man to give her dignity, support and respectability. There was also her constant sense of insecurity and fear as an individual without any power or sense of control over her life—and her political belief in the return of the Tories as being the only way in which some sort of order might be restored to her world. For this was in its way a political household. The politics were right-wing but anti-Fascist; my grandparents had been supporters of Churchill in his stand against Hitler in the Thirties, and what I learnt from them was not so much a set of right-wing views as a belief that it was important to *have* political views; it was important to vote, to belong to and work for a political party, to stand up for your beliefs—a Victorian view of politics as a responsibility. At the same time, of course, their whole outlook was bathed in dreams and memories of lost Imperial grandeur, which I found stifling.

Higher education was my escape route from that. I think there's quite a lot of hostility to intellectuals both on the left and in the Women's Movement, and intellectuals are rightly criticised for elitism at times, but I can't but be thankful for my education (the price of which was my mother's life, in a sense) as it meant I entered a quite different world from the world of my childhood, a world in which I met men and women who had optimism for the future and the energy to fight for a different kind of life than that offered by

—or is that simply indifference?"



the flashy, snobbish society of the Fifties. I gradually found a place for myself in the world of progressives, radicals and liberals.

Along with many others I moved further to the left during the Sixties, as our experiences seemed to show us that the Labour Party wasn't going to change society; and then towards the end of the Sixties there was a great explosion of political activity of a new kind: street theatre, demonstrations, wonderful new political magazines, above all Gay Liberation and the Women's Movement. Because I'd been a feminist at university, when it was unheard of, and right through my working life—in social work, where my views met with intense hostility—I was quite used to the anger it often arouses, so I took it in my stride if I found men on the left—in revolutionary groups—being hostile. I had never expected anything else, so it didn't turn me away from socialism. The two still seemed to me to be part of a total package.

You might still ask, though, why actually *join* the Communist Party, or indeed any party, when there was so much going on politically? But my experience of the New Politics was by no means all one long high. By 1973 I'd come to feel that spontaneity and small groups operating without co-ordination or coherence, in isolation, wasn't enough; it seemed to mean such an expenditure of energy, so much hostility and State repression, and to lead often to such slight gains. 'Life style' politics—your whole life turned into a total political statement, a confrontation of others at all times—was personally exhausting, many individuals couldn't stand the pace and either retreated or freaked out completely. Many women and men were turned off by the new ideas, but many were turned on too. There was sometimes aggression towards and contempt for those who weren't immediately sympathetic to your point of view.

The Communist Party on the other

hand offered a politics that was based on the view (which I share) that in order to achieve a just society you must gain mass support; and that persuasion as well as confrontation is necessary in politics. It connected me with a wider spectrum of politics that included women workers in unions, for example, and gave me more anchorage in the local community politics of my area. The idea too (perhaps more than the reality) of a political party, an organisation that could orchestrate political activity, was attractive. I hoped that the Party would give my own activities more coherence. And up to a point a political structure came as a relief from the problems of the Women's Movement where the lack of structure, necessary and inevitable because of its basis on the small group and a loosely federated organisation of these groups, quite often led to lack of democracy. This didn't mean that I wanted, or expected, the Women's Movement itself to change or become a political party, or that I devalued its attempt to find new and more genuinely democratic forms of organisation.

The experiences of my childhood were part of what made me both a feminist and a socialist: a feminist because of my mother, a socialist because as a child I experienced class difference in an oblique, yet acute way. I knew that the class divide was there and that it meant deprivation for some and luxury for others. I knew that some of the girls from my school were fetched in chauffeur driven limousines; and that we could not afford proper heating, or a telephone, and that my mother wore shabby, worn-out clothes. My beliefs come from these experiences, not from intellectual conviction, and perhaps partly because they were twined together so early I've never felt them as conflicting. When I joined the Communist Party I felt (as I still do) that it's important for women to be active as socialists because without that activity the kind of socialism that will eventually be achieved will be stamped with male assumptions and will leave women better off in economic and welfare terms but still in many ways much as they have always been—imprisoned by motherhood and the family, instead of free to choose and enjoy motherhood. In a socialist society women will still have to struggle for their full freedom; the difference is that in our society now it is *impossible* for all women to be liberated (although a minority perhaps can be) whereas a society with a fair and rational economic system could provide the foundations on which a society free from sexism might be built—but won't be unless women fight for it.

Whether the British Communist Party can be or will be the spearhead of a social transformation of this kind I don't know. It is hampered by its smallness and by its history, the legacy of Stalinism from which it is struggling to escape; that is the un-

democratic practices and questionable interpretations of Marxism along with the bad politics these led to, associated with the period of Stalin's rule in the USSR. And anti-communist propaganda has been very successful in creating or sustaining an immense fear of Communism. This is as true within the Women's Movement as anywhere else, and I often find it almost impossible to distinguish between women's genuine fears (which I share, actually) of a take-over of the movement by left groups with no real interest in women, and straight reactionary Red-baiting. And because I was active in the Women's Liberation Movement long before I joined the Party and was the same person and held the same political views then as now, I often feel bewildered by women who find themselves unable to judge me except in terms of some MacCarthyite stereotype. After all, I remember the Fifties; when Joe MacCarthy in America was hounding all who had ever been even remotely associated with the left so that they were unable to get jobs and many (the lucky ones, who could) left the country. I remember that hysteria and hatred of Reds and progressives of all kinds as it appeared in this country, the grim conformity of the atmosphere in which Guy Burgess, the 'traitor', became some kind of monster-image from society's worst nightmare—a homosexual and a Red. But MacCarthyism isn't just something in the past—this autumn has seen a sustained attack being launched on left wingers in universities and polytechnics with the publication of the Gould Report with its paranoid scenario of Marxists indoctrinating innocent students throughout the reaches of our higher education system. This is just not true, yet the report has been taken up and received wide publicity in the *Times* and daily press generally. Perhaps we are again going to see men and women being sacked and persecuted for their political views. And don't the National Front chant 'We've got to get rid of the Reds'? As far as the Women's Movement is concerned I've quite often felt appalled by women who seem to be saying almost that, because it seems to show such a failure amongst feminists if, dedicated as we are to changing relationships and the ways in which we are with one another, we can't get beyond stereotyping. In the present political climate it is no longer good enough for women who claim to be on the side of progress—whether they classify themselves as socialists, revolutionaries or whatever—to remain obsessed with the horrors of Stalin and his attitude to women and to criticise modern communist parties from a purist position. To criticise the actual practices of the CP is not itself wrong—I'm very critical in many ways myself—but purism is unconstructive; and, even more important, membership of the CP should be seen positively for what it is—a commitment to feminism and socialism.●

"I remember that hysteria and hatred of Reds"

Women Farmers in Zambia

Development research and writing has until now concentrated almost exclusively on men; in fact you could easily get the impression from some works that there are no women in the Third World (except for the mysterious disembodied 'population explosion'). It is time for feminists here to make contact with their sisters in the Third World, to fight against the export of discrimination through 'development' projects. Although their lives seem at first glance so opposite to our own, their demands—for health, safe abortion, the relief of domestic drudgery, the opportunity to earn money and enough of the household income to look after their children and elderly relatives—are the same as ours.

Barbara Rogers, who is a researcher in Development Studies, has recently returned from a two-month visit to five African countries: Malawi, Zambia and Botswana in South Eastern Africa, and the Ivory Coast and Upper Volta in West Africa.

The purpose of the visits was to talk with village women, and learn something about their lives and work, and to discuss their problems, when faced with male-centred 'development' projects. *Women Farmers in Zambia* is the first in a series of articles on Africa.

At the Chapula Irrigation Project in Zambia, the most successful farmers are women. The project's training manager, Margaret Lubinda, is known at the Lusaka headquarters as one of their best project staffers. Increasingly, women throughout the Chapula area are asking for training in the new techniques of food production.

For Zambia, as for practically all underdeveloped countries, the success or failure of these farmers will be crucial. Faced with an acute economic crisis because of falling copper prices, the Zambian Government has declared agricultural self-sufficiency to be a priority in future development planning.

In most of Africa, according to studies done by the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the women do the bulk of the agricultural work. Zambia is no exception, and

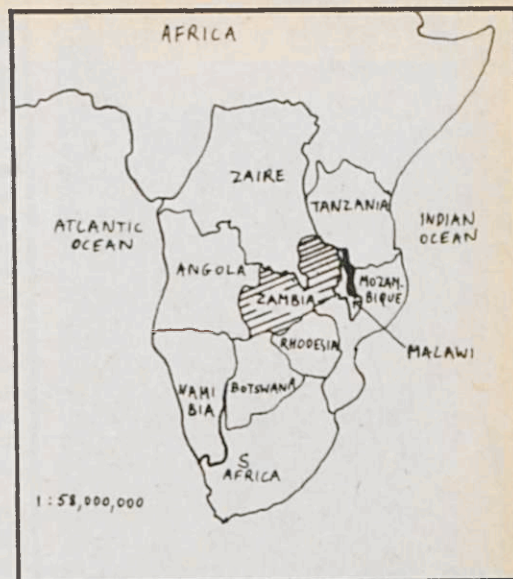
on the Chapula project almost all of those working in the fields are women, even where the primary tenant is registered as the man.

It has not been easy for the women. The first to be trained in the new techniques of irrigated vegetable production was 53-year-old Rachel Mutoba. She told me that she was very proud of having been the pioneer when so many other women were unwilling to try it—others had followed, but only a year and a half later. Even the management had said that women wouldn't be able to do the work, but they had been forced to change their minds because she had done so well. I asked her why she had found the courage to be the first. "Perhaps I was directed by God," she answered.

Another of the early participants is 45-



Margaret Lubinda laughing with Alexandrina Mkandu



Capital: Lusaka
Population: 4.8 million
Major export: Copper
Staple food: maize; cassava and millet in some areas.
Principal feature: Heavy migration to the towns and coppermines, especially by men.
Rural development policy: Greater self-sufficiency in food production.

year-old Alexandrina Mkandu. She was working on her handsome rows of cabbages while I talked to her. She has been on the project for some seven or eight years now, and is quite clear about her ambitions for the future. She uses some of her income from the project to send her children to school, but otherwise every penny is saved. She is planning to buy chickens for a poultry unit and to further expand her capital. Her ultimate goal is to buy an irrigation pump of her own, at which point she will leave the project and develop another plot of her own nearer home, which she will cultivate with her whole family.

These women are fiercely independent: they were adamant that they controlled all the income from their plots, using it to feed, clothe and educate their children, and to send them to school. Alexandrina Mkandu had remarried while working on her plot, after the death of her first husband; her new husband had demanded that she leave the scheme and live off his earnings as a fish-trader. She told him that with eight children from her previous marriage, she simply could not afford to rely on this, and insisted on continuing.

Many of the women I met, both inside and outside the project itself, had no husbands to help them in their work; they were either unmarried or had husbands working in the mining towns of the Copperbelt. These women were not merely supporting their own children, but in several cases their brothers, sisters, parents and assorted other relatives. One project member I saw at her home; Agnes Chembo was supporting about 30 people, both adults and children, while receiving help from only two of them on her vegetable plot. She also built all the houses for them—again, not unusual in the area, where the women do much of the construction and maintenance of the buildings.

The women of the Chapula area are by no means limited to farming: perhaps 90 per cent of all the traders in the nearby



Kalulushi market are women. Some are selling their own produce, but many of them specialise in commerce, buying foodstuffs from the Chapula project as well as individual farmers, taking the bus into town and reselling at a profit. I was introduced to two of the most successful traders. One, Lutha Mukabe, had a very impressive set of houses, granaries, chicken coops and her own van, which she drives between the farming area and the market. She supports two "mothers" (an aunt would be counted as a mother) and employs three full-time workers to deal with her chickens and vegetable fields. She is clearly a successful manager, having started with a Government loan for 100 chickens and, after repaying the loan, constantly re-investing in her farming and commercial business. She had never joined the irrigation project; "the work is too hard" she said.

Despite the success stories, the women of Zambia have a long way to go. Though women traditionally work on the land, training in agriculture is still seen as something for men, and women need unusual determination to break into that field instead of the "home economics" for which the men—especially international development personnel—consider them most suited. Margaret Lubinda, in charge of horticultural training at Chapula for people from all over Zambia, told me that when she trained a few years ago, women in the Natural Resources Development College had been expected to do nutrition, a "safer" subject than agriculture; but this was changing now: "Women are getting more ambitious: they may be trying to challenge men."

But the situation in Zambia is somewhat better than other African countries. In several of the neighbouring countries, where the tradition of women producing most of the food is at least as strong, there are no places for them in agricultural training courses and no female agricultural advisers to work with the farmers at grass-roots level. With the flight of many men to the nearest town—or, as in the case of Malawi, to the mines in South Africa—the women are left alone to support whole families. They face blatant discrimination by the policy-makers with their glib claims to know better than the women where their place is.

BASQUE PROSTITUTES AND FEMINISTS UNITE

Maria Isabel Gutierrez was 23 years old, an unmarried mother and a prostitute. On November 4 she was remanded in custody and sent to Basauri prison awaiting trial for shoplifting in a Bilbao department store. On November 9 she was found dead — burnt alive in her cell.

This is reported to have occurred shortly before 11pm, when the duty warder who stayed all evening in a room next to the cells made her last rounds. Judging from the state of the body, Maria must have been burning for some time.

Incredibly, it seems that neither the warder, nor the inmates of the adjoining cells, nor the staff working in the canteen below, heard anything unusual. Were the screams she must have given so commonplace in this prison as to arouse no curiosity?

Maria is said to have suffered from extreme nervous depression, and only a year before the authorities had labelled her "permanently and absolutely incapable due to schizophrenia". Yet on a shoplifting charge she was sent to the "short-stay" cells in Basauri where prostitutes normally spend three days awaiting trial! Why was she isolated in a prison cell? Why did no-one hear her screams and rescue her?

The official verdict on the affair was suicide. This was dismissed by Maria's mother: "My daughter had a great love

for life and her child, and a horror of fire. She would not commit suicide in this way, even in a fit of depression."

After her funeral, 200 angry women — prostitutes and feminists — gathered to protest at the negligence and sexism which led to Maria's death. Shouting "Murderers! Amnesty for Women! Hypocrites!", they made their way to the centre of Bilbao where more women joined them. Now about 500 strong, they marched to the "Cortes", the ghetto area where most prostitutes operate (and which bears the same name as the national Parliament — hence this ancient and sexist Basque joke: "What's the difference between the 'Cortes' in Bilbao and the 'Cortes' in Madrid? In one you find the mothers, in the other their sons.") "A comrade has died!" the marchers shouted, "No work today: women to the streets!"

This is the first time that prostitutes have joined forces with feminists in the Basque country; the case has aroused much publicity, and many organisations have clearly denounced the double standards of Spanish laws on abortion and prostitution, which have not been affected by the recent amnesty for other offences. Let's hope this new spirit of unity in struggle will achieve results that mean Maria did not die completely in vain.

Translated from Egin by Begonia Tamarit; thanks to Sandra McNeill



W.W.C. LEAFLET

Children of the future

A TUC working party on the underfives produced a report in December which critically surveys existing daycare provisions and outlines "a service for the future". They want to see the development of nursery centres—somewhere between day nurseries and nursery schools, combining, that is, care and education. That artificial division is, they feel, at the heart of the problem—ad-

FOOD: WHY PAY MORE?

NEWS

Shopping for food certainly isn't much fun at the moment. It is shocking and painful every time you pick up a jar of coffee at three times last year's prices, but the pain of buying everything else registers at the cash desk — you don't notice what exactly it is that costs so much more than last week, just know that you're spending a pound more in all. This year 15,862 grocery products rose in price; 23 common foods rose by a penny or more in September, for example, without any announcement or explanation.

It seems to me that the system works like this: when there is any excuse, such as 'harvest failure' or otherwise created 'shortages', the price of a food can go up astronomically, doubling or trebling in price in a few weeks — and then never significantly come down again. We become so used to the outrageous new price that we are grateful for decreases of a few pence. Tea at 24p a quarter is great after tea at 30p or more — as long as you don't remember paying 11p a quarter last year. Is the tea production of the world permanently down? Or are tea pickers at last getting living wages? Well, no. But the tea companies are not likely to lower their prices once they've seen that we will go on buying tea at any figure they can dream up. No, that's not the game at all.

On the other hand, if there is no excuse to hand, prices just rise gradually, so that you can't remember how much you used to pay. So that you never ask why. We grumble, but accept price rises as we accept the weather.

There are, clearly, three *good* reasons for prices to rise: because *either* the people who

produce the raw materials — agricultural workers here and abroad — *or* the people who manufacture food products — factory workers making and packaging food — *or* the people who work in shops selling food are getting a decent wage. Farm workers, shop workers and unskilled factory workers are among the worst paid groups in the country — and none of them have had a significant wage increase in the last year. In third world countries, farm workers producing food for our consumption are generally paid starvation wages that are scandalous even in their impoverished societies — for instance workers on tea plantations in Ceylon are paid 78 rupees a month, that is, just over £3. But there are a lot of *other* people in the 'agribusiness'

who are keeping (well) ahead of inflation . .

Women in the USA have publicly boycotted foods — meat and coffee — that they consider have become too expensive. Here, people's eating patterns have changed in the last few years away from expensive types of meat and from sugar — consumption of sugar never really picked up after the 'shortage' in 1974 which doubled the price.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food reports that although we are buying less food than seven years ago, the nutritional value of the food we do eat has improved. But the burden naturally falls on women to watch their every expenditure — to spend more time shopping and cooking.

Ruth Wallsgrove

Food value for money chart

Are you getting nutritional value for your money? Compare foods that you usually buy to see whether they are good value, medium value, or poor value, relative to each other, at today's prices. Or you can use the chart to compare foods from one week to the next: different vegetables, for example, may be better nutritional value as prices change.

How to use the chart: put a finger next to the food you are interested in and move it along the horizontal line to the right until it is directly below today's price of that food per lb. The colour of the square that your finger finishes in shows if the food is good value at that price, if the food is medium value, and if it is poor value. Now, try again for a different food, or the same food at a different price, and see how it compares. For example: potatoes at 10p per lb = = good value; potatoes at 30p per lb = = poor value; beef at 90p per lb = = poor value; bread at 20p per loaf = = good value.

Note: The prices are per lb except for bread, milk, eggs and beer when you should use the prices per large loaf, dozen or pint.

Chart: Nicola Buck

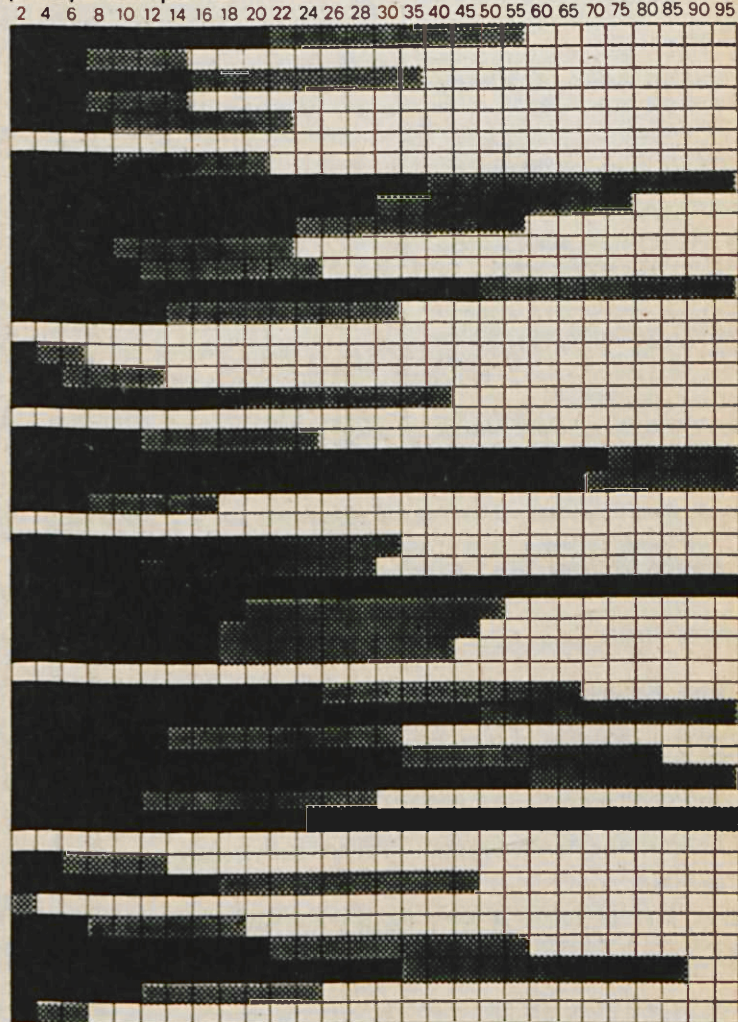
Design: Kate Hepburn

Big Red Diary 1978 published by Pluto Press

Type of Food

Cereals
Bread (p. large loaf)
Cornflakes (not fortified)
Rice, brown
Rice, white
Spaghetti
Vegetables
Baked beans
Carrots
Lentils
Peas
Peas, canned
Potatoes
Spinach
Tomatoes
Fruit
Apples
Bananas
Oranges
Fish
Fish fingers
Kipper and herring
Sardines, tinned
White fish
Meat
Beef and lamb
Chicken
Liver
Luncheon meat
Pork
Sausages
Dairy Products, etc
Butter
Cheddar cheese
Cottage cheese
Eggs (per doz.)
Margarine
Milk (per pint)
Skimmed milk powder
Other Food
Beer (per pint)
Chocolate, milk
Coca Cola
Jam
Potato crisps
Roasted peanuts
Sugar, Barbados
Sugar, white

price per lb in pence



ministration is divided between the DHSS (care) and DES (education); staff are trained as low status 'nursery nurses' or higher status 'nursery teachers', a distinction they think should be done away with. They want an integrated service, run ideally by a new government department, and they want this service to be free of charge and available to all who want to use it — not just for 'social priority' cases but as of right.

These nursery centres would be "important agents for change, for caring and for community involvement". They could include child health centres, toy libraries

and so on. They should be run by management committees of staff, parents and local authority representatives — parental involvement would be a priority. So the working party argue for increased maternity leave and higher maternity grants to make it possible for women to take that time off work without being financially dependent on men. They also want paternity leave, more flexible working hours and better pay and conditions for part-time work. Women have always been treated as failed men and penalised, as they put it, for not fitting into "the traditional model of the male pattern of employ-

ment".

The implications of all this are very radical, perhaps more so than they realise. I felt alienated from the report because of its failure to question the family as an institution — it even suggests the new government department to be called "the Ministry for the Family"! In its eagerness to be correct in holding men as well as women responsible for childcare, it clouds over women's specific oppression — basically the report doesn't recognise how weighty the patriarchy is, so at times it made me feel depressingly small, utopian and powerless.

But their proposals — both short- and long-term — are concrete and useful, the main problem being the lack of funds available to implement them; they consistently argue that daycare is not and should not be cheap, but is a social necessity. The report is well worth reading; it's supposed to be discussed throughout the trade union movement before the General Council "gives consideration to action on its recommendations". Consideration is all it's likely to get.

Jill Nicholls

Available from the TUC, Congress House, 61 Russell St, London WC1 for 50p & postage.

classified

● FEMME women only Disco. Monday & Friday 8pm at the Sols Arms, Hampstead Road, London NW1 only 50p

groups

● NATFHE gay group contact 23 Belitha Villas, London N1.

● Fulham/Barnes/Hammersmith new CR group Gina 731 2889 (evenings) or Dinah 388 2424 ext 3423 (days)

● CR GROUP NW8/NW3 area seeks new members until end Jan telephone Mira 229 8716 or Glennis 935 9801.

● New Islington CR Group. Fortnightly. Contact Christine daytime 701 2209 evenings 607 6521.

● NORTH LONDON WOMEN are you interested in helping us to start a CR (or similar discussion/support/growth) group in N12. If so, phone Josette on 445 0560 (evenings only please).

● South London Women's Writers Group. Any women interested in discussing their writing with other women who also write? Four women have so far met a few times and would like to expand the new group. Phone Caroline 675 0988 or Liz 928 3668.

● BRENTWOOD area. I am interested in joining or forming a group Box 663.

● PRESTON Women's Group meetings every Wednesday at 8pm above Fly In Amber, 17 Fishergate Hill.

● Self-Defence course for women starts February 6 at Elite Marshall Academy. Phone 01-693 9885.

accommodation offered

● WOMAN and child wanted to share house and childcare in country village with Viv and Joanna, 2, write V Candlish, 2 Fairhill Cottages, Alston, CUMBRIA.

● Two women and a 12 year old girl are looking for another woman to share their house on a long-term basis for at least a year at Elephant and Castle. We live communally and share child-care. No rent, share bills. Please contact Liz or Judith 01-928 3668.

● Only room in mixed communal house (N. London) for feminist at £35 a month and share of bills. Contact 01-359 9524.

● CHELSEA HOUSEBOAT needs responsible resourceful solvent occupants to share. FEMINIST lessee needs sisterly company. Can both ends meet? (double £25pw, single £20) Box 666

● FEMINIST ARTIST convalescing illness seeks tidy responsible woman share charming West London flat. O/R Reception. References £16 pw 01-385 4613 (10am-8pm)

wanted

● 25 year old gay woman and her (straight) Cairn Terrier Bitch need accommodation (preferably sharing) anywhere in NOTTINGHAM area. Temporary or permanent. Box 669.

● Mother/Son (6) urgently need permanent home Norwich/London. Ms Bowden, 24 High Street, Blakeney, Norfolk.

● TWO FEMINISTS want room each in friendly house, preferably in fairly easy reach of Central London. Contact Jo or Marion 01-691 2792.

MIXED BOP see page 2

contacts

● Manchester gay girl wishes to meet same. Box 668.

● Tall slim unmarried man. Research worker, would like to meet lady to 40. Single, divorced or unmarried mum. Box 665.

● Woman 32 Man 37 kids 6½ and 8 who partly live as a family, but mainly live in separate places want to meet others with better alternatives to the nuclear family, especially feminists/socialists 30+ who are moving towards small viable collectives in the London area. Box 667.

● Homosexual? Lesbian? Problems? Ring the women and men at FRIEND any evening on 01-359 7371/2

● Feminist vegetarian looking for people to live with who are taking charge of their lives and have or will share in finding housing. Box 664.

● Gay woman (feminist) mid twenties seeks friendly faces in the wilderness of the SLOUGH/UXBRIDGE area. Box 670.

● Gay girl 20s seeks friendship with similar Lancashire area. Box 670.

● LESBIAN quiet 21 year old teacher seeks friend Essex London area likes theatre music. Box 671.

● Any Spare Rib readers in RUGBY area? Newcomer with small children seeks like-minded others. Ring Sue Marton 632917.

● ROMAN CATHOLICS! Fed up with sexism in the Church? 01 886 0779 Box 662.

general services

● PAINTING AND DECORATING—professionally done at reasonable rates. Phone Lesley: 01-359 0348 (London).

● Astrological Birth Charts and detailed character analysis £5, including future trends/potentials £7. Send birth details with remittance; alternatively send for free price list: John Willmott, Knockan, Bunessan, Mull, Argyll.

work wanted

● I have a daughter 2½ and would like to take care of another child. Contact Nisheetha, 54 Brougham Rd, E8. Messages 249 7042.

wanted

● DRUMMER wanted for mixed band. DIRE TRIBE, playing anti-sexist modern music. Contact Claudine 01-272 8217 or Harriet 01-272 0887.

● We are 2 women making animated films on differences between language used by women and men. If interested in working with us Tuesday evenings phone 01-743 5789 or 01-542 9741.

Rosemary Sayigh who wrote about Palestinian women living in camps, (SR 66) will shortly have her book on Palestinian marginality published by Zed Press.

travel

● CHINA 1978: General tour July, young persons economy tour August, study tours September and October. Cost from £800 for 3 weeks (reductions possible in special cases) SAE for details to Tours Organiser, SACU 152 Camden High Street, LONDON NW1.

● INDIA with minibus, 1 year leaving August Autumn 1979. Anne Miller, Churchill College, Cambridge.

JOBS

● Festival Club needs someone reliable. Typing essential, capable of accurate filing and willing to run messages. Flexible hours. Ring 240 3197.

● Someone to look after small baby. Three, possibly five, days a week. Stoke Newington 800 7853.

● CHILD WORKER required at Lambeth Women's Aid. 27-hour + per week. Salary £49.60 weekly. One year full driving licence essential plus experience with children. Lambeth resident preferable. Letters of application with details of experience and reasons for applying to: 44 Josephine Avenue, SW2. Closing date 31st January.

RESEARCH INTO THE HOUSING NEEDS OF BATTERED WOMEN

Research worker needed for 2 year project on the housing needs of battered women sponsored by NAWF and financed by the Department of the Environment. The worker will be part of a team of 3. Candidates should have a good knowledge and experience of housing, and/or Local Government, previous research experience and preferably involvement in the Women's Movement and/or Women's Aid. The Project is likely to be located in the north of England. Expected starting date 1st March '78. Salary approx £3,800. Closing date 30th Jan. Replies to: National Women's Aid Federation, 51 Chalcott Road, London NW1. Telephone: 01-586 0104 or 01-586 5192.

● WORKERS needed for Belfast Women's Aid refuge. Details from Debby Shorley, 148 Malone Avenue, Belfast 9.

● ISLINGTON BUS CO: COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRE, involved in assisting the work of Islington groups, kids, play under fives, tenants groups etc, needs a worker to join team of seven. We are looking for someone experienced and interested in under fives. Person should be energetic, self-motivated, able to work in non-hierarchical group preferably with a working knowledge of Islington. Driver preferred. Salary £3,000 pa. Further details: METHODIST CHURCH, PALMER PLACE, LONDON N7. Telephone 01-609 0226. Closing date 31st January 1978.

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courses

● **THE PELLIN CENTRE LONDON—A PLACE FOR PURPOSE** Workshops and Groups in Contribution Training and Gestalt.

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Wednesday, 8th February: Beginning of ongoing afternoon group for pregnant women and mothers of small children. ASPECTS OF THE BIRTH EXPERIENCE: The joys and work that follow. Contact Clea at 946 1742.

Friday, 10th—Sunday, 12th February: **WOMEN AND OUR CREATIVITY**. A workshop for women led by Mary Scarlett.

Thursday, 23rd February, evening: Preliminary meeting of an ONGOING GROUP: Learning to contribute from our hurt. For women and men. Led by Mary Scarlett.

Friday, 3rd—Sunday 5th March: A workshop on **PARENTING** for women and men. Led by Anna Farrow.

Thursday 16th—Sunday 19th March: **LOVE, SEX AND AFFECTION**, a workshop on lasting intimate relationships. Led by Peter Fleming, Director of the Pellin Institute, Italy.

Also individual counselling. Contact Anna or Mary at 946 1430.

● **WOMEN'S HISTORY SINCE THE SUFFRAGETTES** Mondays from Jan 9th 6.30-8.30 Working Men's College NW1, details from Maggie 790 4954.

● **INNER LIBERATION** We are an active work study and meditation community based on Tibetan Buddhist practice. May all beings find the joy of their true potential! Please write to Conishead Priory, Ulverston, Cumbria, or telephone 0224 54019.

● **THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE?** Image and identity of women today. 13th March 9.30-4.30. Speakers including Dale Spender and Zoe Fairbairns. Video films and discussion at Harrow College of Technology & Art, Northwick Park, Harrow. This is to be the first of a series of study dates (later dates 19th April and 24th May). Creche provided. Contact Madeleine Trehearne or Ruth Swirsky at HCTA for details 01-864 4411 extension 56 for details.

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Applications are invited for admission to a two-year full-time course starting in September 1978. The course is designed to train and qualify people for work with adults and young people in various community settings.

The kind of applicant we are looking for will be between 23-43 as a general rule and will have worked for a minimum of two years. Applicants will probably have had some related experience (part-time or voluntary) and may or may not have formal educational qualifications.

Selection will be by written application and interview. For full details write to: The Admissions Tutor (SR), University of London Goldsmiths' College, Department of Adult Studies, Community and Youth Work Course, 38 Lewisham Way, New Cross, London SE14 6NP.

publications

● **Astrological Birth Charts** and detailed character analysis £5.00, including future trends and potential £7.00, each person receives friendly individual attention. John Willmott, Knockam, Bunessan, Mull, Argyll.

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● **GAIA'S GUIDE—1978. FOR GAY WOMEN.** All new, revised, updated and greatly expanded thoroughly detailed handy pocket size international lesbian bar/club guide and complete directory. This fifth edition: 35 countries/ listings. Centres, switchboards, bookstores/mail order houses, publications, services and much, much more. £2.00 only (£2.50 overseas) from: GAIA'S GUIDE, One, North End Road, London W14 (discreet mail order only—fast delivery). Also on sale at THE GATEWAYS and STERLING'S BOOKSTORE, 57 St Martin's Lane, London WC2.

therapy/growth

● **MASSAGE THERAPY**, escalen, acupressure, polarity. Deep relaxation, body/breath awareness. Call Shanti 486 9717.

publications

● **PLEASE** someone recommend books for couple travelling world on foot starting family on the way. Telephone Lis Wheathampstead 2275.

WOMENS BOP
see page two
for details

wanted

● **HELP, HELP, HELP!** We are trying to complete our file of all copies of SPARE RIB and find we are missing copies of 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 20, 23, 25, 26, 28, 37, 38 & 45. Anybody who has any one of these back copies and could offer them back to us so that we can have a complete file here at the SPARE RIB offices please contact Carole 253 9793.

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NOVEMBER
DECEMBER

WHAT SOME PEOPLE THOUGHT

(not everyone wanted to give their name)

I haven't been involved in the movement before. I think it's necessary, there's got to be something really revolutionary, hasn't there? The festival's been very small, I expected hundreds and thousands of people like a pop festival. The reason this place interested me is I knew there'd be something positive, not just moaning about men and society. I can ring my friends and have a moan anyway. But maybe when I get back home this time I'll get in contact with a women's group *Elizabeth* ■ I took two young women from my youth project group. One of them really hated the

Meg Christian and Teresa Trull (right): Really high energy. It's fantastic they've got a feminist record company together too. Some people didn't like that, and the way they told us to buy their records. But I liked it. They were really into audience participation, and there were lots of sing-alongs *Pat* ■ I felt they were lesbian chauvinists—singing All Women Are Lovely, but if you're still heterosexual you haven't sorted out your head. As if sleeping with women and smiling was all we needed. They seemed to expect an instant ecstasy from the audience, and some of the audience obliged. But I didn't feel they were trying to interact with me—they were just putting on a show *Ruth* ■ *Ova* is the most exciting band I've heard come out of the women's movement. They're exciting musically—combining congas with electric instruments—and politically, giving a real sense of optimism and growing. For the first time I heard the kind of music I wanted to make myself *Noni* ■ *Classical Cream Teas*: Wonderful. I've never been interested in classical music, but the Adelphi string quartet were just so powerful *Pat* ■

building and the people, she felt they were all Americans and all phoney ■ The atmosphere's fantastic, not something I've ever come across before, a real women's thing *Mary* ■ I'd like it to go on, but haven't always been fantastically lucky on the days I chose to come. I was embarrassed to have men around when things didn't come off, like the films on December 15; I felt we'd be seen as a bunch of incompetent women ■ I liked the way it was so varied. The therapy workshop was the most important for me, the Women's Therapy Centre are doing work which very few people know about *Jackie* ■ I'm not sure really whether the festival reflects what's going on in the women's movement in this country, more in the States. Our American sisters have a hell of a lot to teach us in the way of energy, but while feminism in the States is much more enterprising it's also much more part of the system. The attitude here tended to be liberal—"if women think that, we must accept it"; for example, the film *A Trip Around Jenny* didn't set up a critical framework around 'Jenny's' racism. There was no space for discussion so some women who objected had to leave *Marion* ■ At all the films I've seen the film-maker wasn't present, so how could they discuss the intentions of the film. Some weren't at all clear. And the poster collective flashed through a lot of slides of their work without explaining the thinking behind each one ■ I'd like to have a really big outdoor festival like the Dutch feminists have every September, for mixed audiences in the daytime and women only at night. It seems a really open and confident thing to do, and not shutting out women who want to come with men either. I don't like discos myself, but we need a chance to get together and bop—so I liked the musical events *Pat* ■ The inflatables were good but it was a bit difficult to get on them and there were lots of big old children there who wouldn't help you on if you asked them nicely. There was a sort of train thing and a ring one, and there was a square one and two going round the corner. People were bouncing right near you and making you fall off but it was good *Lucy* ■

Janie, Andrea, Tierl, Gillian and Pam (above): I was knocked out. The lyrics were the great thing; about marriage, street hassles, male politics, a relationship with a woman. About our lives. I think music and humour are the most important things for women to develop, they're the way to build up a real culture. Black people have their humour and their music, it's part of the fight *Claire* ■ I felt funny about 'Lindsay Cooper and friends'. They were playing around with instruments, making it up as they went along, anyone-can-do-it feminist kind of thing, but the only reason they could do it—or that we paid to sit in rows listening—was because they were 'experts' on those instruments. Then *Sisterrock*—a big rock band from Denmark—they were very competent musically but monotonous (and not just because I couldn't understand the words). I found the event a bit couply too, all cordoned off in pairs—did this mean people didn't come together at the Festival, didn't make new friends and sisters in struggle: or just that they did make new lovers? *Jill* ■



Goodbye for now from Jam Today



THEATRE AND DANCE

I thought *Voices* (above) was very powerful. The thing that amazed me about it was that I identified with every single one of those women, part of their experience had been mine too. It was a shame that all the characters were middle-class and that their experience was American, because I think that made the play less accessible. But I got a lot out of it *Claire* ■ *Kennedy's Children* ends with each character isolated, and that's what the play's about. But in *Voices*, I wanted the women to come together, and it didn't work. For me the monologues just stayed apart. I thought *Pirate Jenny* were fantastic in *Bouncing Back With Benyon*, they'd gone far beyond agitprop, they had a Laurel and Hardy type of quickness—I kept thinking, I'll never remember all these jokes! *Anne* ■ *Pretty Ugly* was a nice slick production, it exposed the pressure of the fashion media on teenage girls—but it didn't present an alternative. It didn't show a teenager refusing to knuckle under and still making a go of her life *Carol* ■ We gave a reading from *The Three Marias*, and we all felt we wanted more feedback from the audience. If you put a lot of work into a performance and then it's over—it's depressingly like the straight theatre *Natasha* ■ There was a *dance workshop* (right) every week, at the one I went to we were playing a ball game with pieces of wood and a bread roll and shouting our names as we threw. It developed into running around with great exuberance. Then came working with a partner, balancing, learning confidence with someone else. It was really nice ■

DISCUSSIONS

It's marvellous not to have any men around, it really is. I don't know why, I'm happily married. But it's such a relief. One criticism: a lot of the discussion failed as it was inaudible *Olga* ■ ART: I haven't got any background in art or images at all. A lot of things were presented very quickly so you knew there were a lot of women artists working now, and got an international feeling too. But I'd have liked to go more slowly, had more time to look carefully at a few things ■ SEXUALITY: It wasn't really a workshop where women could share their experiences. More a lecture. The woman who spoke was a Californian sexologist, she presented sexuality as a series of scientific facts. Some women wanted to talk about vaginal sensations, others worried about the politics of showing a film of lesbian love-making to mixed audiences—but she didn't want to discuss things *Sara* ■ One woman asked if the film about masturbation was made by a woman, and the sexologist just laughed and said "shut up!" ■ OLDER WOMEN: The best consciousness-raising I've heard in years. You get to feel so jaded when you've been in the movement a long time, everyone starts to sound the same. I realised then that it's because so many of us actually *are* the same! I can't wait for lots of older women to get into the movement in an organised way so we can all learn from them. Zelda agreed to be a contact, 01-607 4323 *Amanda* ■ MATRIARCHY: The idea makes us examine our unconscious preconceptions. All religions to have survived are patriarchal, they all affect our thinking about ourselves now even if we think we've rejected religion, they're all part of the rubbish we have to throw out *Nina* ■

FUTURE PROJECTS:

Every time I've come here I've bumped into someone I know, which is great as I'm doing a film course and really isolated. I've met other feminist film students here and we've arranged a meeting to show each other our

films and maybe start a group. Unless we build up this kind of support for each other, women going into the arts are going to give up. So I'd like the festival to become a twice-yearly event *Audrey* ■ I'm trying to start a big women's sculpture project, possibly for the next national women's liberation conference, a big joint work about abortion, menstruation, equal pay or something like that. I announced it at the art workshop and some of us are going to start work at the Women's Arts Alliance *Nina* ■ We don't want to organise or take part in another women's festival unless it's in a women's building. How do we get a women's building together? One suggestion was a warehouse space to house A Woman's Place information centre, the Women's Arts Alliance and other women's collectives that aren't securely housed at the moment. A group will be meeting to take the idea further at WAA, 10 Cambridge Mews Terrace NW1 ■

reviews

theatre

OUR OWN PEOPLE

by David Edgar

performed by 'Pirate Jenny'

David Edgar is preoccupied with the figure of the likeable National Fronter, rebelling at a class society grown even more cruel in its decay, but ending up looking for changes not to the Left, but to the Right. They are uncomfortable plays for a radical audience, forcing us to see how many of our ideas are tied to middle-class 'enlightenment' or counter-culture complacency; forcing us to see how fascism can seem to express real working-class needs.

In *Our Own People* the crucial figure, the 'racial Trotskyist', is a woman, Joan Dawson, a militant steward and a feminist in her way, furious at the running down of the mills and the community surrounding them; blaming it all on the Blacks. It's an amazing performance from Chrissie Cotterhill, as she realises she's sold out 'her own' women's jobs by dealing with management to exclude the Asian weavers.

The truth is dragged up, layer by layer, at an industrial enquiry. The courtroom form is perfect for Edgar's writing where meticulously documented episodes build up into something very moving. It also allows the force of dialectic to each new division that is revealed: white/asian; skilled/unskilled; night/day; worker/management; union bureaucracy/rank and file; legal/illegal immigrant; national/international capital; finally, men/women. The sexual division of labour is presented as a final stroke. Emotionally, however, I felt it carried the least weight. Speeches from an Asian woman militant and the summing up from a feminist lawyer never really compete with the play's central images of an industry, a people, raised up on imperialism and now facing the reckoning. There's no happy together-we're-strong-sisters-and-brothers ending. In fact no ending at all. Some lines get re-drawn. I suppose what happens next is up to us.

Amanda Sebestyen

Pirate Jenny is now on tour. Information from 01-969 2292. Performances 7.30 Jan 26-28: Strathclyde University. 30: St Catherine's Centre, Aberdeen. 31: Labour Club, Roseangle, Dundee. Feb 1: Rosebank, Dundee. 2: Edinburgh Trades Council. 3, 4: Edinburgh. 7: Chaucer's Club, Hardman St,

Liverpool. 10: Tower Hill Centre, Kirby. 14: Teeside Ploy, Middlesbrough. 15: Cleator Moor Civic Hall, Cumbria. 16: Workington Civic Hall. 17: Durham University. 18: Newcastle Trades Council. 22: Sussex University. 23: Hilderstone A.E. Centre, Broadstairs. 24: Folkestone Labour Party. 25: Crawley Tec. 26: Kent University. Mar 1: Sheffield Antifascist Committee. 2, 3: Cannon Hill Park Art Centre, Birmingham. 4: Tameside TU Council.

A BIT OF ROUGH

by Gilly Fraser

In this play a bit of fluff comes home to her bit of rough after being raped by her ex-husband at an arty-party. The boy friend isn't surprised—to him she does look dressed for the part—slinky tight black skirt, loose light big sweater, high heels and, we are told, no knickers. She's the movie-goers image of the archetypal 50s tart. Or else she's walked straight off the cover of any 1977 fashion magazine.

This play differs from your regular situation drama in which the woman is the victim and man the soft-hearted working class guy who's life has conditioned him for thuggery. The woman reaches through her experience and through incredulity at her fella's reaction to an understanding of her situation and in particular of the horrors of the hypocrisy of the fashion world. Most important, she comes to see how clothes affect her own attitude to herself.

The bit of fluff makes an enormous recovery (Carole Hayman is Ace, as they say) she discovers rationality, and the truth of her own experience. Calmly rejecting pills and self mutilation, she packs her bags and leaves. I cheered.

Natasha Morgan

films

NEA

(A YOUNG EMMANUELLE)

Directed by Nelly Kaplan

Based on the novel by Emmanuelle Arsan which, it seems, spawned all the other Emmanuelle films. *Nea* has recently been showing to a scattering of seedy raincoats in a couple of London's scruffier cinemas. Which is very sad, because it deserves far wider distribution.

Nea is not at all the same thing as the up-market, glossy soft porn of the other Emmanuelles; it's horribly bad-

ly dubbed and rather jerkily edited and the colour isn't always nice. But it's the most erotic film I've ever seen. And it's not sexist.

Sybil Ashby is a precocious, pushy little rich girl imprisoned in her family's elegant mansion on the shores of Lake Geneva. Sybil's family is, let's say, unusual. Daddy's money holds the whole scene together, but only just. What with mother making love to her sister-in-law and Sybil spitting fire at the dinner table or speeding off to explore her sexuality in her garden hide-away, his patriarchal authority is twitching and tottering. No matter how often he splutters with rage or spurs his great grey Freudian horse symbolically across the horizon he still can't really contain the female rebellion.

Sybil lives a secret life composing 'Nea', her 'grand roman erotique', with time out for masturbating when the creative flow gets blocked. Her cat Scum looks on, rolling and purring ecstatically and tuning us in even more to her sensual raptures.

Shoplifting female erotica in a Geneva bookshop, Sybil is caught red-handed by the delectable Axel Thorpe, avant-garde publisher (Sami Frey). But after she boasts of her literary talents and shows him the first pages of *Nea* he is disarmed, attracted, and alarmed. He proposes a secret publishing contract, and Sybil proposes they sign it in blood. (She's into witchy things and magical rituals like slicing her fingers with penknives, which certainly brought my adolescence back.) This all happens in one of the most erotic sequences I've ever gasped at—over a cafe table heaped with oozing Swiss eclairs. (She's into cakes too.)

But Sybil's fantasy life can only fuel her writing as far as voyeurism. Of love she has no experience. She decides Axel must be her instructor. Axel lives alone in a creepy Gothic castle on the other side of the lake—more juicy symbols here with boats across the dark lake and long corridors. And a locked door to his dead mother's room, where flowers, frills and, presumably, Axel's emotional self rest in peace, all wittily underlining his constant masculine refrain 'I don't want to talk about it'.

What Axel doesn't realise is that his protégée is intent on battering down all locked doors, and that by 'love' she means not just sexual athletics but passion, equality, mutual surrender, completion, the works. Her absolutism is a bit much for him (she's also sitting naked

with pen and notebook at the ready), and his sophisticated playboy manner isn't adequate to cope with this new phenomenon. Part of his character armour has to crumble, and there follows a very erotic bed scene where he lets his hair down emotionally. However, the next day he decrees that since she's a minor they must not meet until the novel is safely published. "Until the snow on the roof of the mountain chapel melts" he says lyrically.

Sybil pines and fumes endlessly, and Axel blocks her demands, saying that a promise is a promise. 'Nea' comes out to national acclaim and right-wing protest. The snow still hasn't melted—so Sybil burns the chapel down. Triumphant she slips into Axel's castle, where she spies him in bed with her hated sister, giving a cold-eyed virtuoso sexual performance.

Broken-hearted at this betrayal, our heroine doesn't commit suicide or anything like that. She's a determined power-plotter, after all, so she collects her share of the money and constructs her revenge with suitably witchy ingenuity. This I won't give away, but a lot more fun and games at the expense of male authority ensue, and I will say that love, passion and these sorts of absolutes win out over uptightness and calculation in the end. And I found it all very thrilling. So did the other feminist tittering in the back row. The raincoat brigade was silenced.

Alison Fell

music

NATURE'S RADIO, 1977

You live your life In the songs you hear On the rock'n'roll radio...

So sings Helen Reddy in 'Angie Baby', a song which tells of the ultimate in radio experience: the instrument fulfils all its fantasy promises, and actually turns into a lover for Angie. This remarkable little story represents several of the extraordinary contradictions we accept in the messages of pop music. Angie is mad ('or is she?') and has only her radio for company. A young man gets into her room aiming to rape her, and she somehow transmutes him into a benign being who inhabits her radio and forever after acts at her command. An odd myth.

Still, we all have weird relationships with our radios, raped at one moment, soothed at the next. Often it is all too

dance



INTERNATIONAL DANCE SEASON (ICA 1st-19th Nov)

'Stings' by Margaret Beals

'Stings', a dance-interpretation of 'Ariel', the final poems of Sylvia Plath, is the culmination of four years work by American performer, Margaret Beals. At the ICA she collaborates with two other women—Lee Nagrin and Brooke Meyers, each of them playing Plath in solos and group pieces. In this way they explore the contradictions in her character and embody her experiences as a woman.

On stage the three women literally *live* the poems, their voices recording, their bodies speaking. The landscape through which the poems journey is stark—a desert sizzling with haunting mirages—motifs of Plath's obsession with her father, her husband, motherhood, her suicide attempts. The physical/verbal identification of the performers with the woman and the poems produced an electric and often unbearable tension.

Whilst the whole lacked variation, the overall experience was powerful and unforgettable. The absorption, focus and energy that the three women displayed in their exploration of Plath's inner and creative life compelled the audience to travel with them, emerging, as I did, emotionally exhausted.

Anna Purze

backgroundy to impinge, but at other times we are alarmed at the blatant sexism of a particular lyric, and none of us is immune to a sudden irrational attack of pungent nostalgia brought on by an old song, or

to the unexpected relevance of the occasional new release.

The rock and roll radio of 1977 had us living out our lives in much the same way as usual. The same seams were still mined, and we had our

emotions described, proscribed and contained all in the same old ways; radio gives us the messages of mass emotion. We looked at four songs about those romantic sufferers, the rejectees.

Rejection seems to provide a never ending source of material, rich in the ironies of feelings we've learnt to love. For however much the singers wail and moan, however acute their pain, 'It's All In The Game': we smile, because we know that give or take a couple of weeks, they'll be all dreamy eyed again. Of all the hymns to self-pity in 1977, Nazareth's re-release of 'Love Hurts' is the most effective. Whereas the Everly Brothers whined it out in slow harmony, and Jim Capaldi bopped it, Nazareth harshly grind the bitterness into every note:

*Some fools dream of happiness,
blissfulness, togetherness—
Some fools fool themselves,
I guess,*

*But they're not fooling me;
I've really learned a lot, really
learned a lot,*

*Love is like a flame, burns you
when it's hot: Love Hurts.*

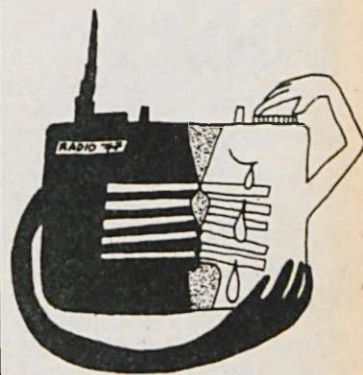
On the surface it seems that the singer is rejecting romantic myths, but, accomplished and experienced listeners that we are, we know it's really *him* who's been told to push off. Similarly, the 10cc all-time hit, 'I'm Not In Love' actually means the opposite: I'm desperately in love.

Rejection songs seem to be of two main types: those which suggest that the rejecter has broken the rules of the game, and those which tell of an inevitable natural cycle. In the rules camp, we have Donna Summer's 'Love's Unkind'—she's in love with this guy who fancies her best friend. Her best friend fancies someone else. What a mess. And apparently it's her momma who tells her that love's unkind. Is being rejected hereditary? The music is not slow and slushy, but strangely cheerful and disco-beat, which rather takes the sting out of the tragic message. Perhaps a more interesting song is Crystal Gayle's 'Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue'. ("Even my mother likes this one," said the radio DJ.) Crystal can't face the rejection she's just got, and she doesn't want the truth—she gives him instructions on how to behave (lying, in fact) to help her swallow the pill.

*Tell me no secrets, tell me
some lies,*

*Give me no reasons, give me
alibis . . .*

Although she comes up with some ideas on how to control



her pain, she still sings it all in a very mushy and moany way.

In the biological inevitability camp, we can expect few surprises: for since dear old nature (usually chemistry) brings us together, presumably she'll bust us up too—not much any of us can do about it. (There's very little about History in pop messages: except for the ones that go, last year you were only fourteen but my goodness look at you now, you've got long hair and tits etc.)

Nature mysteriously controls our relationships—a remarkable record surfaced briefly in late 1977 called 'Nature's Radio', sung by Mickey Jupp:

*I can tell by the look in your
eyes*

*When it's time for me to go,
Cos the information will be
coming over*

On Nature's radio.

*You won't have to tell me,
Cos I'll already know—*

*The information will be
coming over*

On Nature's radio.

On Nature's radio-ho.

Made up of strange intuitions, and subject to the mysterious laws of the cosmos, we signal to each other like pulsars. If it's all written in the infinite canopy of the heavens, who are we to question the eternal patterns of attraction and repulsion?

The romantic principles which pop music relentlessly propagates seem on the one hand like trivia—but on the other hand they powerfully pervade our lives. It's transient, and yet the themes it harps on seem indestructible. A lot of people say they don't listen to the lyrics, but if you do, you can't help noticing how reactionary are the messages relentlessly dripping into your ears. Just how does pop music manage to be slight and forceful at the same time? Presumably it successfully plays upon all our own mixed feelings about romance and romantic myths.

Susan Hemmings
and Laura Margolis

reviews

books

THE SUFFRAGETTE MOVEMENT

by Sylvia Pankhurst
(Virago, £2.95)

QUEEN CHRISTABEL

by David Mitchell

(Macdonald and Jane's, £8.95)

Sylvia Pankhurst wrote a richly detailed, passionately argued history of militant feminism. From its publication in 1932 *The Suffragette Movement* became a classic. It's just been republished, and it remains a valuable source book for feminists today. Christabel Pankhurst's memoir, *Unshackled*, came out in 1958 and made reviewers 'rock with laughter'. Ever since, it's remained largely unread (largely unreadable). Sylvia Pankhurst worked with women in East London at a grass-roots level—for creches as well as for votes—and she was at the centre of movements for radical change; she wanted 'social soviets' where women could take control of their communities—an idea far in advance of events in Russia, China or Portugal. Christabel Pankhurst was an autocrat leading an increasingly elitist and centralised campaign; the First World War turned her into an ardent militarist begging the Government to give servicemen the vote before women. In 1919, 'the year of revolutions', she set up a Woman's Party with what can only be described as a social-fascist programme. Sylvia Pankhurst spent the last years of her life an honoured guest in a country (Ethiopia) she'd

struggled to see free of colonial oppression. Christabel Pankhurst became a religious fanatic and a Dame; she died after 25 obscure years in Southern California. Suicide was suspected.

These are the outlines of the myth that feminists have inherited as our history. Why, then, do I say that it's Christabel Pankhurst the women's movement should be looking at more closely today?

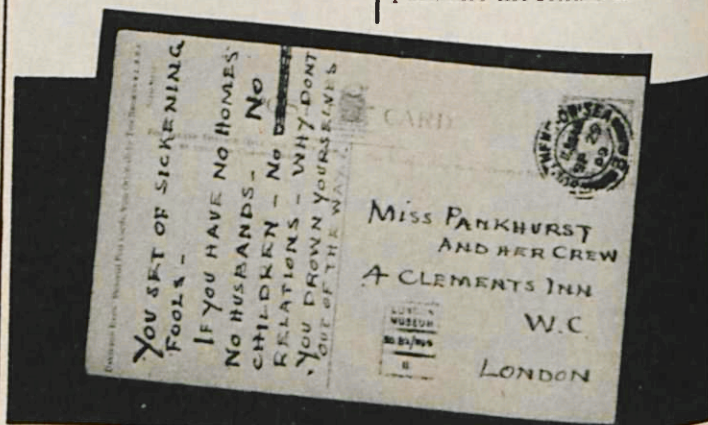
She was, as Sylvia acknowledged, 'the only begetter' of militant feminism, whose deliberate arrest and imprisonment in 1905 dragged the suffragette question out of forty years' obscurity.

David Mitchell's biography prefers to present Christabel not as a tactician but as a precocious superstar, pushed on by an ambitious stage mother who manipulated her daughter's image as 'the Mahomet of militancy' to carry out a number of purges within the organisation. Sylvia Pankhurst herself presents exactly the opposite picture of Christabel, the dominant personality, seducing her mother away from socialism and into the excitement of an urban terrorist campaign. Both the left, following Sylvia, and liberal historians like Mitchell have tended to trivialise the WSPU's development by explaining it in terms of Christabel and Mrs Pankhurst's personal relationships. Mitchell, for example, hasn't found out anything new about Christabel's crucial period of exile in Paris and its effect on her politics; he obviously thinks it's enough to describe her possible connection with a lesbian salon purely for its sensation value and not as (or if) it changed her life.

The extent of Christabel's personality cult admittedly makes this reduction of history too easy. Her image was worn on badges, 'adored' in her absence at meetings, and launched a massive sale of picture postcards. But 'Our Sylvia' had a certain personality cult of her own; threatening to starve to death on the Prime Minister's doorstep is not necessarily the action of a modest democrat. Sylvia Pankhurst tried to use the hunger strike as the focus of a mass movement, admittedly; but she (and Mrs Pankhurst) also used it to project a traditional image of suffering womanhood: "I was always convinced that the element of martyrdom provided the highest and keenest incentive to our movement."

esting as Christabel Pankhurst herself. He's brought together all the debates with independent militants like Teresa Billington and Mary Gawthorpe, sexual libertarians like Dora Marsden, Fabians like the Pethick-Lawrences and revolutionaries like Sylvia Pankhurst. He's dug out old letters and gossip (want to know who fancied who at Clement's Inn in 1906? it's all there). And more importantly he's interviewed some of the surviving suffragettes like Jessie Kenney and asked at least some of the relevant political questions. But Mitchell's book is exasperating even though it does contain information which isn't otherwise to be found between two covers.

Feminists today try to politicise the sexual life. And



Christabel's attitude to violence was quite different, she looked to the emergence of women as a fighting force. Sylvia's East London Federation formed a People's Army for self-defence, with dockers as well as suffragettes providing the muscle; but the WSPU were before them with their Women's Bodyguard, armed with clubs. Christabel saw the Bodyguard as successors to the Furies, rising up against the patriarchy—"beings with unknown stores of force, mental and spiritual, who have remained silent and submissive for centuries". The words could have been written by a radical feminist today, and in fact Christabel's politics have all the strengths and weaknesses of that position. The weaknesses were her lurch to the radical right and her subsidence into millennial fantasy. The strengths were her grasp of feminist autonomy—"self-reliance" she called it, rejecting the notion that women's struggles could only be progressive if linked to the struggles of progressive men.

David Mitchell has understood the fascinating contemporary relevance of this and his book should have been as inter-

our opponents, then as now, try to sexualise the political, to reduce the demands of women to a series of menstrual and menopausal ravings. What's infuriating about Mitchell's account is that it goes on doing just this. So, he can't admit that Christabel's first arrest roused women to anger and solidarity—no, it "Provoked a warm quasi-organic gush of gratitude and heroine worship", and so on. In his last chapter, Mitchell goes over the top, compares Christabel to Mein-hof and expresses sympathy for those poor "prison staffs which had to deal with writhing WSPU militants, and German doctors... sorely tempted to let their charges die of hunger if they wished". Or "drown themselves out of the way", perhaps, as one of the suffragettes' anonymous correspondents suggested.

The hate mail the militants received was one small part of the phenomenal weight of sex hostility that came down on them. Attackers at public meetings would routinely go for the breasts and genitals, and many of the women assaulted in the Black Friday march on the House of Commons became



Adoring a portrait of the Absent Leader

permanent invalids. Some died. At first, feminists tried to deny what Mitchell describes as "the richly psychopathic implications of the sex war". Later, Christabel Pankhurst took up a very definite position in a series of articles about prostitution and the spread of syphilis and gonorrhea, for which she's been ridiculed ever since. (It seems now that her allegation that 75% of men were infected was not unfounded but has been borne out by recent research, and the White Slave Trade was certainly a horrible reality.) What she was really saying, though, and what shocked sexual libertarians then as much as it does now, was that relationships between men and women—the New Woman and the 'old' man—had become impossible. Celibacy was the only political option open to her and many women like her.

Sylvia Pankhurst's was the sort of socialist feminism that aspired to 'rise above' the sex

war. At the time, she was appalled not only by Christabel's *Great Scourge* articles but by the breakaway feminists of the *Freewoman* magazine and their brave articles on sexual self-expression, on birth control, on lesbianism. Her idea of a title for the East London Suffragette's paper was *The Worker's Mate*—luckily the East London women preferred *The Women's Dreadnought*! Her view of femininity was very orthodox in many ways. Her first book, *The Suffragette*, written in 1911 before her split from the organisation, presents WSPU members as radiant and desirable beyond belief, while by the time she's writing *The Suffragette Movement* the same women have developed premature wrinkles, neurotic ailments and stunted intellects... Which all goes to show that the history of the suffragettes we really need hasn't yet been written.

Amanda Sebestyen

polemic; the politicised are likely to object to the lack of discussion of underlying substantive issues; and it's easy prey to the academic put-down. For anyone like me simply suffering from an overdose of adulatory accounts of 'good' books for children, the two volumes inject a welcome blast of cold air into the climate of discussion.

They take a look at what is available overall for children to read, disregarding the usual divide of sheep (the literary classics) and goats (comics and Enid Blyton). The brief description and critical commentary of more than 200 works covers a good range—from early children's classics to two of the most popular reading schemes currently in use in schools (Ladybird and Breakthrough to Literacy), and contemporary writers for older children, including lesser known ones. Inevitably the time-span and sheer quantity taken on doesn't allow for searching analyses of the latest offerings, though Dixon takes a largely critical view of both familiar and less familiar titles. He also picks out those unfortunately few titles which can be recommended as showing positive attitudes. I found myself wondering whether, had he worked at more current things the list would have been longer.

Volume 1 includes discussion—albeit somewhat sketchy—of language in relation to sexism, race and class, and a consideration of the way in which stereotypes are often deeply embedded in common language usage or in attitudes to accent and dialect. Reputations are subject to some timely alteration, particularly in Volume 2. Thus devotees of C S Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*, Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*, and Richard Adam's *Watership Down* will find their faith disconcertingly challenged.

Robert Leeson's credentials are clearly on view; as a committed children's book writer and literary editor of the *Morning Star* his standpoint is fairly predictable. He offers a brief statement which confronts a personal dilemma—does 'commitment' as a writer of children's books have to mean separation 'from the world... of creativity... condemned to formula writing of didactic content for the purpose of social engineering?' Leeson discusses this with a lightness of touch and an edge of humour which I liked very much, and with insight derived from his own struggles to

write books 'in which ordinary children... might recognise themselves, yet feel the vicarious excitement for which convention deems characters from a class apart to be necessary'. The first piece tended, I thought, towards a cursory run-through of two-hundred years of children's literature—a literature in Leeson's view imbued with middle class values and attitudes—with a somewhat idealised backward glance at a golden age when the oral tradition supposedly carried tales from the hovel to the hall and back again. I think there is something in this, myself, but there isn't room in the short account Leeson gives to develop the ideas adequately.

It seems worth noting in conclusion that approval ratings don't always tally between books; thus Glenys Loban in her piece in *Sexism In Children's Books* makes a number of objections to the stereotyped presentations of parental roles in a reading scheme described by Robert Leeson in his book as 'bouncily working class Nippers' and welcomed by him as a corrective to the 'smoothly suburban world of the typical reader'.

Heather Lyons

about kids' books

SEXISM IN CHILDREN'S

BOOKS

by Children's Rights

Workshop (60p)

CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND

CLASS SOCIETY PAST AND PRESENT

by Robert Leeson

(Writers and Readers

Publishing Co-operative 65p)

CATCHING THEM YOUNG:

Volume 1 Sex, Race and Class

in Children's Fiction: Volume

2 Political Ideas in Children's

Fiction by Bob Dixon

(Pluto £1.80 each)

Feminists in need of ammunition for arguments about sexist picture books, assumedly unavailable 'quality' children's literature or first readers in school will welcome *Sexism In Children's Books*, a second collection of papers from CRW. Among them is a reprint of the McGraw-Hill guidelines for equal treatment of the sexes, originally prepared by the American publishing company 'for the benefit of its editorial staff and authors' in 1974.

The guidelines certainly seem admirable on paper though, like the Sex Discrimination Act, leave you with the uncomfortable question: did it make any difference? There is nothing in the book to suggest whether it did or not.

However there are plenty of usable facts and figures elsewhere and some tellingly selected illustrations, both textual and pictorial. Suzanne Czaplinski's meticulous headcount of male and female characters in award-winning picture books yields no surprises overall—there are always considerably more males than females—though there's a useful table for countering the march of progress argument showing the presence of female characters diminishing dramatically in the 1960s.

For *Spare Rib* readers who are already trying to take account of sexism, race and class in children's literature, Bob Dixon's slightly self-conscious attempt at consciousness-raising in his two-volume *Catching Them Young* may jar somewhat. Cultural elitists will find it a tasteless

Available at last in GB is one of USA's best known attempts at a conscious treatment of the sex role socialisation of little boys, *William's Doll* (Harper & Row £2.95) is a delicately illustrated picture book about William who gets his doll (thanks to Gran) against all the odds thrown up by the rest of his family. Although pretty didactic, this is very useful when little boys get the wrong ideas about being gentle, kind and caring. Andrew Mann CRW

LOVE OF WORKER BEES

by Alexandra Kollontai,

translated by Cathy Porter

(Virago £2.50)

SELECTED WRITINGS OF

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

translated with an introduction

and commentaries by Alix Holt

(Allison and Busby £2.95)

The task of 'retrieving' our history is an uphill process. The publication of *Love of Worker Bees* and *Selected Writings* makes an important contribution to it. The fact that these two books have been translated by women informed by the concepts of the current Women's Liberation Movement adds greatly to their value and accessibility. A couple of years ago I read the 1931 English version of 'Vasilisa Malygina', (one of the stories in *Love of Worker Bees*) published under the title 'Free Love': besides being somewhat bewildered by the title, I found the language stilted, even bizarre, in places. Cathy Porter's translation is a great improvement.

Even without the language barrier, access to sources is an impediment to any study of Soviet history. In the absence of 'hard facts' the effect of the

reviews

revolutionary period on the lives of women, and the role (if any) of women's politics, has been appropriated by a variety of dogmatic interpretations. Every subsequent political movement, Trotskyist, anarchist or Stalinist, has returned to the Russian Revolution to draw its own conclusions.

Kollontai was one of the few women Party activists of the time. She consciously applied herself to the 'Woman Question' in her practical work and her writings. *Selected Writings* indicates the breadth of her politics; she did not confine herself to women's matters in a narrow way. On reading *Selected Writings* I was struck by the context in which Kollontai was writing—as a social democrat (and later a Bolshevik), rather than as a feminist in the sense we use the



term today. Before 1917 Kollontai's emphasis (as Lenin's) was firmly on drawing the distinctions between social democratic politics and bourgeois politics.

In the propaganda piece 'Working Woman and Mother' Kollontai takes the lives of four women—a bourgeois lady, her maid, a laundress and a factory worker—and follows each through her different fates during pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. (Incidentally, it is probably Kollontai's views on motherhood that the modern reader will find most unfamiliar, if not discordant.) It was not until after the Revolution that, in her fiction and non-fiction, Kollontai addressed the more complex issues of personal struggle and codes of behaviour in the transition period.

In *Selected Writings* Alix Holt raises many of the questions which socialist feminists today would wish to discuss in relation to Kollontai. She also explains the relevance (or sometimes irrelevance) of Kollontai's ideas to political events. The Introduction and commentary are certainly worth reading in their own right.

There is no doubt that *Love of Worker Bees* is a romantic book. The three stories are set

in revolutionary Russia between the 1917 Revolution and the first years of the New Economic Policy in the early 20s. The plots have a common theme, they centre on Bolshevik Party circles and the heroines are politically active women.

In 'Vasilisa Malygina', Vasilisa meets her lover Vladimir in the heady days of 1917 and they grow close through working together politically. Dictates of Party work during the Civil War brings separation and increasing difficulties for their relationship. When the lovers attempt to live together after the Civil War, Vasilisa finds that Vladimir wants her to fill the role of conventional wife. The ambiguity of her emotions in relation to Vladimir is interwoven with her attempt to understand the changing political situation and her feelings of alienation from new attitudes and styles of work within the Party.

The two shorter stories do not develop the emotional lives of the characters to the same extent. But they also depict many aspects of social life and personal struggle in the revolutionary period, containing a wealth of references to the social problems of the time; shortage of housing, lack of food, unemployment, women driven to prostitution. In 'Three Generations' Kollontai takes up a theme she returns to in her non-fiction, of exploring the ways in which personal morality changes with social upheaval.

Selected Writings will possibly not reach a wide audience. Non-fiction can be hard to read and Kollontai is an obscure, if not unknown, figure to many people. I do hope that, at least, people read *Love of Worker Bees*. The stories make enjoyable reading and are as good a start as any to thinking about the dynamics of the Russian Revolution, and the hopes and disappointments which the period held for women.

Hilary Knight

poetry

our apologies to
michele roberts for our
mistake in her christmas
poem last issue
The last line should read:
WE SHALL BE NO LONGER
CORPSES IN THE CHURCH
AND MOUTHS OF MEN.

MINEFIELD

by Judith Kazantzis

(Sidgwick & Jackson £1.00)

These are poems by a woman sharp of ear and of eye, con-

stantly curious about the world around her and inside her, precise and imaginative in recording her responses to it.

Some of the poems deal with subjects common to many women's experience: the family, domestic tasks, relationships with lovers, mothers and children. Each of them is rendered with an acuteness of observation, an originality of word-choice, that takes Judith Kazantzis far away from any hint of rhetoric or cliché, except where she chooses to use this for the purpose of irony. Experiences we have all shared, yes, but spoken in a voice that is highly distinct and original. Other poems reflect less the specifically female person than the lonely, sensual, wry individual constantly recording the flux of self, other, world.

The individuality of focus comes out through a dazzling succession of newly-minted and tightly-worked metaphors which employ strangeness, odd juxtapositions, visual clarity and vernacular speech for their effect. The handling of language is totally satisfying: time and again I exclaimed Yes, that's exactly it, you have made me see what you mean. As well as delight, the poems also give pain: the very integrity of the language, as well as the nature of the subject-matter, is a reminder of how, if we let ourselves feel, we go through experiences which can be frightening or distressing, which poems can fix, reshape and translate, but never remove.

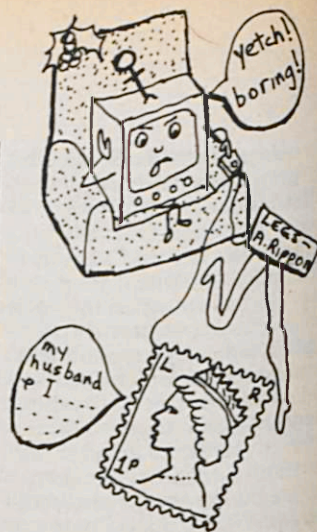
Michele Roberts

tv

CHRISTMAS TELEVISION

It's been a pretty bleak time for feminists watching television particularly over Christmas. Anthea as the deliberately stupid female foil to funny, quick-witted Bruce Forsyth; Angela Rippon's legs again; the endless male jokes about 'the' wife and 'the' mother-in-law—the continual sexist assault both visual and verbal makes it hard to pick out the odd exception without giving it too much prominence.

But it might be worth analysing the Queen's performance as a contrast—what is her place in the Christmas family ritual? I watched her stiff, terrified form and face and listened to her thin upper-middle class voice mouthing a speech about Reconciliation and the Christian message amidst all the rest of the sexist objectification of women that went on over Christmas. It exemplified the poverty of feminine representa-



tions in male dominated society.

However, just before Christmas there was a half hour documentary on how women suffering from acute pre-menstrual tension can get treatment which, from their accounts, has transformed their lives. The treatment is still only available in two clinics throughout Britain and the research was begun by a woman doctor 15 years ago working virtually on her own. It seems outrageous that research into something which most women must have some experience of should have had so little money and publicity. Most of the women interviewed told stories of wanting to batter their children and husbands every month and being palmed off by the family doctor with tranquillisers or homilies about putting up with being a woman. After years of tension they had finally been recommended to the pre-menstrual clinic and cured.

Jean McCrindle

Christmas television struck me as a support group for the comedians—all laughing at each others' jokes and dropping each others' names. Still, Morecambe and Wise were good as the gayer than ever 'Starkers and Crutch'. The best thing—apart from 'The Big Sleep'—was Shirley Maclaine's cheshire cat smile at the very end of 'The Apartment'. It made up for all the plastic.

Jill Nicholls

THE LONDON

WEEKEND SHOW

—'Young Lesbians'

(December 18, LWTv)

This was a thoroughly all right programme, presenting two happy well-adjusted lesbians (from Lesbian Line) with all the right comments—on a Sunday (family!) afternoon, to 'young people'. The researcher told me he had tried to find some lesbians with more problems, but couldn't. As it was, the programme was optimistic—apolitical, but nice.

Ruth Wallsgrove

Cheap at half
the price

TOOTH & NAIL

Spare Rib
Women's Bop
see page 32

The INEQuality Press

Mel Martin is a cheerful blonde who was amazed to find herself chosen for the Lydia part. "When I had my hair dyed black I found strange things happening. No more whistles from building sites. Instead, people started to talk to me, discuss things with me, ask for my point of view. And I started to be self-assertive and speak my mind." It sounds as though it is a good thing she has gone back to being blonde.

Sunday Telegraph magazine
From Sue Steward, London NW1

Fellow feeling

music. In fact the counter-tenor as a solo voice was little used before the Restoration, and using countertenors in castrato parts or in Bach's alto parts is only an approximation to authenticity — preferable to a woman's voice less the actual sound quality than for the masculine musical sensibility.

Guardian, 24/10/77
From R L Gaskin, London SW15.

Masterpiece

However, the play itself is a most masculine performance, if I can use that word to imply energy, fair-mindedness and bold construction.

Times, 10/9/77

If Pam Gems had managed to write a feminine play, we can assume it would have been tired, prejudiced and timid. Lovely, isn't it! Report by Mary Alden, London SW18.

Who to attack

about sexist ads

The manufacturers of the product advertised and the agency who make up the ad.

Who to complain to

The Advertising Standards Authority, 15 Ridgmount Street, London WC1. The Independent Broadcasting Authority, 70 Brompton Road, London SW9, for TV ads and ITV programmes.

Who to work with

The National Union of Journalists: send a letter of complaint about sexist articles to the Mother or Father of the NUJ Chapel at the publication concerned, with a copy to the editor, and to the Equality Working Party, NUJ, Acorn House, 314 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Affirm (Alliance For Fair Images and Representation in Media): a group acting against sexism and offensive stereotyping, can be contacted at 35 Colehearn Road, London SW10

Kasmin gallery owner

I've chosen *Portrait of Two Ladies*. Two's better than one. There is nothing like a beautiful nipple. This is an image I always carry in my mind, it turns me on. They are not my favourite figures, but for me present the essence of femininity. Women together are incredibly erotic. It is just a perfect moment. Also I like titled ladies. It excites too, because one is the *royneur*; they are teasing us. It awakens all your senses which is what you want women to do. You can almost hear the pinch. A stocking, a suspender belt and a garter are perfect female images; they really sum it up
Sunday Times magazine, 13/11/77
From Rita Craft, London SE12, and
Natasha Morgan.

Ralph Koltai theatre designer

Don't be misled by the posture of Allen Jones' sculpture, merely a convenience for drinking coffee. Total femininity, beauty and intelligence clearly reflected. If there is a flaw in her perfection only Roman Polanski would know — she belongs to him.

Woman disappears

seldom practised. Ernest Benzon at number 10, an iron merchant and one of the founders of the Vickers empire, used to entertain men like Browning, Alfred de Musset, Felix Mendelssohn, George Eliot and the Halles to dinner, Sunday Telegraph magazine
From Sue Steward, London NW1.

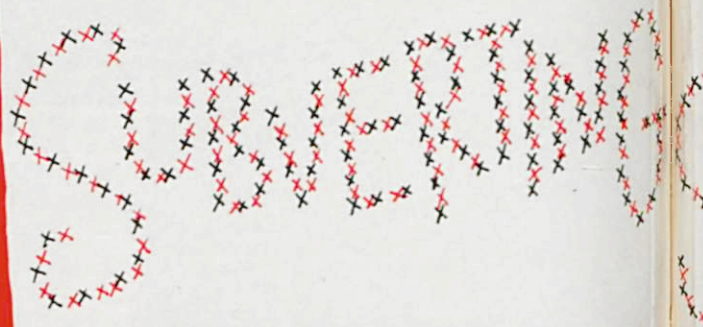
Cast off

Not from the Country Garden but from Sylvia's of 25 Beauchamp Place, London S.W.3, is this modern copy of a Victorian bootjack. Easy Lizzie (as this copy of a Victorian circus rider has been named) is used just like a conventional boot jack—put one boot on her and use her legs to ease the other boot off. Made of cast iron with a polyurethane varnish, Easy Lizzie costs £5.95 from Sylvia's. Sylvia will post for 90p p and p.



Financial Times, 8/10/77

Sent in by Nicky Blandford, Exeter.



Beryl angrily waves the tea-towel in the air. 'KING DRYER' the trade mark says big and red in the middle. "It's the 'KING' bit . . . that's where it hits you, when you have three kids, two guineapigs, one cat and live in a semi-detached in Watford." She was illustrating to me more than explaining why she embroiders her frustration into handkerchiefs, cushion-covers and teatowels.

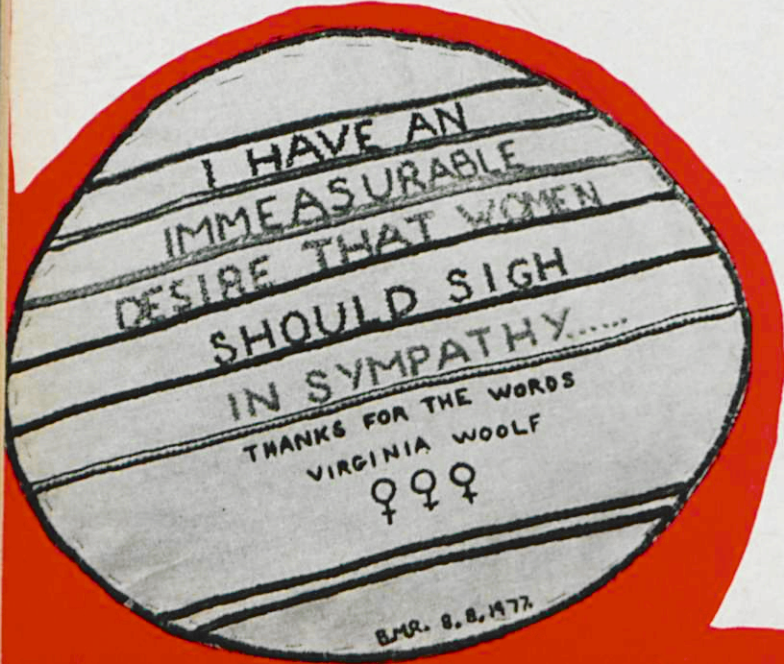
Beryl Weaver, who is 40, describes herself as a housewife drowning in suburbia—'shattered and shuttered', tired and tied. "But one day" she exclaims "oh it must be seven years ago, I left the washing up, and sat down to read a paper written by some women. It was all about the drudgery of housework and the isolation of women in their homes; as plain as the nose on your face it was. I thought 'just

my kind of women' and went and found them in Chalk Farm." But women's liberationists are very few and far between. "So now" she sighs "I feel a bit of an eccentric in Watford, somebody with an obsession . . . And sometimes I get real doubts; they all look so normal and ordinary there, that I start feeling we've got it all wrong . . . That's what suburbia does for you. Too late to move now." She's silent, smiles painfully, but soon lights up again. "What's important is to use what we've got: our housewives' heritage." And as she says this, she dips into her shopping bag and, with a real witches' cackle, drops a parcel of neatly starched and ironed colourfully embroidered bits and pieces in front of me. "Just to show you I've not been wasting my time" she comments. There's flowers everywhere, and surprises as well. While I admire the delicateness and



subtle colour combinations of a bouquet on a 'doiley', I very suddenly get transfixed by the pattern on the vase: an invasion of women's symbols. Beryl who'd been waiting for the effect, bursts out laughing at my amazement, and quickly pulls out a cushion cover with another traditional flower pattern. Subversively she'd woven into it 'Flourish with Flowers' and smaller 'This cushion cover must not be SAT upon'. "It really gets under my skin" she explodes "the way we're always compared to flowers; women and flowers—personal and warm—pretty but stultified. One man even went as far as to say he liked women to be independent, so he could go from one to the other, like a bee on springflowers." But why then obsessively embroider them, I mused. "I need to fix my memories somehow, and say in a tangible way that housewives are here and alive. But" she points out "I was never encouraged to create disturbing images, so my anger comes through in the pretty pictures I was brought up with."

There's a handkerchief with a lady in a



QUESTIONS



it. I often get stuck for words and what I did to that tealcloth is my way of saying I'm furious, and frustrated that in this day and age, men have a licence to rape because they 'serve' their country." She points again at the other, 'KING DRYER', tea-towel "This symbolises it all. Next thing I'll do is to write PATRIARCHY under it, and it'll be in double-cross stitch . . ."

"I'm also very sentimental, especially when I start thinking about women together. That's why the Suffrage Hanky article (embroidered names of suffragettes in prison) in *Spare Rib* (No 61) made me cry. I wanted to make something that expressed the solidarity we feel now. But I found it impossible, because we're a thread of women, and you cannot single out names, because everybody's impor-

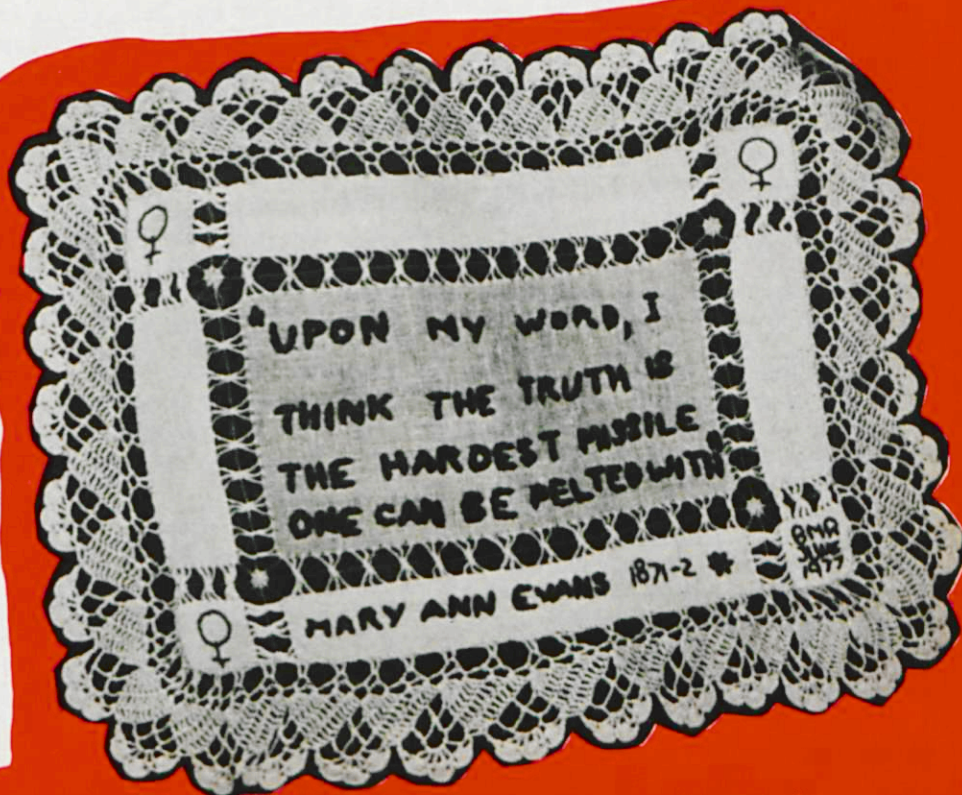
tant." A sip of coffee, a moment of silence and Beryl concludes that "chainstitch would be the obvious stitch to use for it." I ask her if she thinks of herself as an artist and she half-smilingly answers "No, I'm filling time, or maybe I am wasting time . . . I suppose I do use a box of coloured silks like a palette and I like mixing and dabbing them round . . . But I've never thought of it as really creative . . ."

After hesitating a couple of weeks though, she did pin her tea towels, hankies, samplers and cushion covers on a curtain as part of an exhibition at the Women's Arts Alliance. The theme of the exhibition was apt: 'More a way of Life.'

ANNY BRACKX

crinoline—a pretty picture—stiff and rigid, picking flowers—a woman's work. But as Beryl made her, she called it 'To women's work—Two women's work'. She identifies with her creation even though their class origins are different. "Most housewives feel confined, futile, and without outlet. Knitting and crochet, tatting, lacework and embroidery, all things women do indoors, are common occupations that cross class boundaries. They're time-fillers and a solace. It's obsessive and it can keep you captive in a vicious circle of fund-raising bazaars and other 'world-shattering' charitable events." She now pulls an object from her shopping bag which is neither stringbag or purse. "Look there's a real time-filler for you" she shrieks.

Both her mother and aunt embroidered, but Beryl didn't learn from anyone in particular; she's just always done it . . . There have been gaps, and she explains how she got to do the batch in front of me. "It's the Holdsworth rape thing really. That got me so angry, that I had to grab my nearest tealcloth and stab away at



The Pill... as bad as we thought

Two studies have recently been published in the *Lancet* about the risks of taking the contraceptive Pill. The main report comes from the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) which gave us a pro-Pill whitewash document in 1974.¹ Now Oliver Gillie writes in the *Sunday Times* that "much of what the public has been told in the past about the Pill was misleading. Enthusiasts have oversold the Pill and now it can be seen that the risks for older women are much higher than was ever thought likely before." In fact *Jill Rakusen* criticised the optimistic conclusions of the 1974 report in *SR 32*. Here she assesses these findings and comments on the medical establishment's reactions. Clearly women have been misled — we don't need Gillie to tell us that — though many of the figures, including those relating to older women, are hardly a revelation.

The RCGP's report² compared death-rates in Pill-users, ex-users and non-users. It drew on a study of 46,000 women in Britain over a period of eight years. The other report— from Oxford³—was based on data from about 17,000 women, some using the Pill, some the IUD and some the cap. Its results were consistent with those from the RCGP, which were:*

- 1 The death rate from circulatory diseases in women who had ever used the Pill was roughly five times that of 'controls', ie women of similar age etc who had never used the Pill.
- 2 The death rate increased with age, cigarette smoking and duration of Pill use, but at all ages it was higher in 'ever-users' than non-users.
- 3 If the Pill was taken continuously for five years or more, the death rate increased to roughly ten times that for non-users. All the deaths which involved Pill use of five years or more occurred in women aged 35 or more. (Few younger women had taken the Pill for this long, so the risk for them could not be assessed.)
- 4 The death rate for 'ever-users' was 'much greater' than the death rate from pregnancy in the non-users.

are these findings significant?

All the figures quoted for deaths from circulatory disease are 'statistically significant'—in other words, it is most unlikely that chance is the cause of the difference. The actual risks quoted are, it is stressed, approximate, and it is possible that they could vary considerably. However, Pill users studied had tended to have fewer serious past illnesses than non-users, and had previously experienced a lower prevalence of circulatory disease.

* The risks quoted here are approximate, as they're based on small numbers of deaths, and they cannot be applied to countries where the incidence of circulatory disease is different.

Some people have cast doubt on the findings. First, it has been pointed out, the number of deaths that occurred overall was small (101 out of about 46,000 women in the RCGP study). Certainly the figures from either study would have limited significance if taken in isolation, but looking at them in conjunction with other research is rather a different matter. (So is breaking the figures down into different categories, such as age, length of use or kind of disease involved, in this case circulatory disease.) Both studies confirm each other, while also supporting the conclusions of several earlier pieces of research⁴. They fit even more closely last year's predictions⁵ by Valerie Beral, principal author of the RCGP study.

Another factor considered by some (eg the FPA) to cast doubt on the results is that oestrogen doses have changed since the study began. But Valerie Beral has confirmed to me that most of the women—and most of those who died—were on low-dose oestrogen Pills. Furthermore, in earlier research on deaths from heart-attack⁴, Mann and Inman found that oestrogen dosage appeared to be irrelevant; and Dr Beral in her earlier study⁵ found that low-dose pills were not exonerated. Also the RCGP data strongly suggests that progestogen (the other component in the Pill) is now suspect as a cause of thrombosis (in the past only oestrogen dosage has been considered relevant). Finally, the Presidents of the RCGP and of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists are themselves unsure whether lower doses of oestrogen have any advantages.

so what's new?

By no means all the information in these two reports is earthshatteringly new. Certainly, the possibility that risks may extend to women who have stopped using the Pill is a new development, and deaths from circulatory diseases appear to be more varied than had previously been thought. For example, the increased inci-

dence of subarachnoid haemorrhage (bleeding in the fluid-filled space around the brain) was not strongly suspected before.

Apart from that, duration of use has been strongly implicated before with regard to heart attack⁴, and other studies have indicated increases in blood pressure after five years of use. The differences in overall and age-related risks appear greater than estimated before, but they broadly confirm Valerie Beral's observations of death rate trends in 21 countries⁵. On the basis of previous studies, the risk of death in women over 40 has been considered unacceptably high, while in women aged 30-39, the risk has been considered high enough to recommend discontinuing the Pill if one risk factor (eg smoking, hypertension or even long-term use) and especially more than one is present. Even in the 1974 study, the death rate from circulatory disease was found to be three times higher in Pill takers than non-users. The report excused this as statistically insignificant, but as Dr Beral pointed out at the time, this was 'a cause for concern', when combined with other evidence in the same report.

So it seems unrealistic to dismiss the serious implications of this research, though it's hardly realistic for Oliver Gillie to suggest that "the risks for older women are much higher than was ever thought likely before". Since no nationwide warnings on the Pill have appeared since the over-optimistic publicity round the 1974 report, it is timely that recommendations should be widely circulated to all doctors in the country.

recommendations

Several bodies and individuals have now made recommendations. Some take the findings seriously, some are sceptical—possibly ignoring some of the evidence, or worse, misrepresenting it.

The Committee on Safety of Medicines⁶ is among the sceptics. Its recommendations are wishy-washy, probably the result of a compromise: that no change

is necessary in the warnings and precautions for the Pill "except to emphasise the importance of the increased risk for women in the later age group, especially those who are cigarette smokers".

The DHSS is somewhat less sceptical, managing a two-faced role of supporting the CSM while drawing attention to recommendations made by the presidents of two Royal Colleges that:

- a) all women over 35 taking the Pill "would be wise to reconsider their method of contraception";
- b) some women aged 30-35 ought to reconsider, especially those on the Pill more than five years and smokers;
- c) for women under 30, they have "no evidence to justify recommending any change of practice", while emphasising the "general advantage of stopping smoking"; and
- d) they add that they are "unable to determine from present evidence whether oral contraceptives containing lower doses of oestrogen confer any advantages over those containing 50 mcg".

Two important medical journals make similar comments: the *Lancet*—"It would seem wise to consider other forms of contraception for women with more than one risk factor and also for those in older age groups"—and the *British Medical Journal*—"blanket reassurance can no longer be given to women above the age of 30" and "No longer does it seem reasonable to expect women to take oral contraceptives for virtually their whole reproductive span". (Why, however, the BMJ ever thought that taking the Pill throughout one's fertile life was reasonable given the evidence, or lack of it, is difficult to imagine!)

What about the FPA? In a detailed press release, it comes out in favour of the CSM's recommendations, not even mentioning those of the Royal College presidents. It stresses the fact that most women are now taking Pills with less than 50mcg of oestrogen, that the overall death rate of all women in the studies was below the national average (while not explaining the possible reasons why—such as social class variations). They also mention that in the RCGP study "there is a suggestion that the Pill could have a protective effect against cancer". In fact, while the figures may suggest this, the report does not examine such possible benefits of the Pill because the figures could be due to other factors, and evidence as to whether the Pill can increase or reduce incidence of cancer is conflicting and inconclusive. A fuller discussion of this issue would have been helpful in the report.

Perhaps most surprising—particularly in the light of the RCGP findings—is the FPA's assertion that "the known risks related to Pill-taking need also to be assessed against the risks of unwanted pregnancy". The FPA and others eager to encourage women to take the Pill have consistently stated in the past that the risks of the Pill are less than those from pregnancy and childbirth. This has always been based on fallacy, for pregnancy is not the sole alternative to the Pill. It's particularly disturbing that the FPA continues to imply this in the light of current research.

what are we to make of all this?

It is still difficult to draw conclusions for individual women. We do not have enough data to assess the relationship between age, smoking and duration of use, nor to compare continuous use with sporadic or intermittent use, or heavy with 'light' smoking. Moreover the data cannot tell us how long after stopping the Pill women might be at risk, nor which women.

This leads us to wonder whether despite the vast amount of research, all the conditions that might be affected by the Pill are showing up. As the years go by, more and more problems appear: first of all the risk from thrombosis, then heart attack, strokes and liver tumours; more recently, the possibility of an increase of incidence of cervical cancer in long-term users, and finally these studies' findings.

Surprising as it may seem, these are the first pieces of long-term research to emerge since the Pill was first doled out in the 1950s, in spite of the many warning signs that appeared soon afterwards. Also few animal studies concerned with safety were performed before the Pill was given to large numbers of women. So today even larger numbers of women are effectively being experimented on.

There is also the problem of defining which groups of women may be at risk. In these two studies, for example, all the women concerned were healthier, on average, than the general population and tended to be drawn from a "higher" social class. (The effect of drugs on people from different classes is as yet unresearched.) Other unresearched categories may also be at risk.

Take the question of women who are light in weight, a subject which has intrigued me for some time. When I took the Pill, it seemed strange to me—weighing less than seven stone—why a dosage that could stop a woman of ten or twelve stone being pregnant was also necessary for me! It seemed even stranger when I discovered that bodyweight is usually taken into account when the effect of drugs is assessed. Searching the text books, I could find none that even considered the subject; nor could anyone else enlighten me. But finally, in June 1977, a brief report appeared in the *BMJ*⁷ considering "The relation of body weight to side effects associated with oral contraceptives". Out of about 500 women, the lowest incidence of reported side effects (such as menstrual cramps, nausea and vomiting) appeared amongst 'overweight' women. 'Underweight' women reported the highest incidence. These differences tended to disappear after the third cycle, but this preliminary study suggests a need for more research, and serves to illustrate a point.

Not since the RCGP's 1974 report has there been such media interest in the Pill. That was an interim report, the results being "too important to be withheld for many years". No-one, as far as I am aware, has discussed the present findings in the context of that glowing report and the fact that, three years later, the RCGP President is discouraging all women over

35 from taking the Pill and casting doubt on the wisdom of any woman over 30 taking it.

Why the apparent change of tune? In SR 32 I explored many of the reasons for the 1974 report's bias against risks. Since then, Barbara Seaman reports an interview with William Inman of the CSM, who said that many of the figures for complications were too low.⁸ Another reason for the change is that the main author of the latest RCGP report was herself a critic of the way the RCGP had previously presented figures on death rates.

But a more fundamental question remains. If much of the information in these latest studies is not new, why has there been so little official recognition in Britain until now of the known risks of the Pill?

The answer is of course to do with politics. Women's needs are rarely put first when it comes to developing and monitoring contraceptive techniques or providing information about them. It has suited too many people for too long that the Pill should be freed from suspicion. It is easy to see how those concerned with population control should fear a steep rise in the birth rate if many women were to stop using the Pill—for 'The Pill' has become virtually synonymous with 'Contraception'. Similarly, it has been easy for politicians and decision-makers not to provide a comprehensive birth control service—which includes sterilisation. And finally, they can ignore the abortion issue... for perhaps only as long as women are expected to go on the Pill.

But now at last it's official—yes, there are risks. Exactly what and to whom they apply is still a big question, so the choice for women is hardly any easier. But even if the situation were clearer, women could still not make a real choice as long as birth control facilities are not uniformly available. One thing becoming clear as a result of these reports is that the demand for sterilisation—both male and female—is far exceeding supply.

These studies serve to expose a contradiction in the system: that while in theory, choice of birth control method is available to any woman who wants to use it, in practice this is limited... to those methods compatible with more powerful outside interests. ●



1 Oral Contraceptives and Health by Royal College of General Practitioners (Pitman Medical) 1974.

2 "Mortality among oral-contraceptive users" by Royal College of General Practitioners' Oral Contraception Study, *The Lancet* 8.10.77.

3 "Mortality among women participating in the Oxford/Family Planning Association Contraceptive Study" by M P Vessey, K McPherson, and Bridget Johnson, *The Lancet* 8.10.77.

4 For example, Mann and Inman, *BMJ* 3.5.75; Mann et al, *BMJ* 3.5.75; A K Jain, *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 126, p 301 1976.

5 "Cardiovascular disease, mortality trends and oral-contraceptive use in young women" by Valerie Beral, *The Lancet* 13.11.76

6 A government body which can make recommendations but not enforce them.

7 *BMJ* 25.6.77, P P Taylor and G S Berger.

8 *Women and the Crisis in Sex Hormones* Rawson, USA) 1977.

Monday Oct. 3rd

9.30am: We collected the van and set off up the A10. We're excited—after all the preparation this will be the real test. The van, a hired Ford Escort, is crammed full with two tables, ten boxes of books, blankets, plastic sheeting, sleeping bags, flasks, maps and leaflets . . .

11.30am: Put up the banner—looks great! Phone BBC to arrange interviews. We must spend all our time on interviews for the media—we've come here to meet women, but some publicity is crucial to let women in the area know we're here.

3.15pm: We've been thrown off our pitch in Kings Lynn. As soon as we set up the stall in the market the traffic warden arrived and we were made to leave.

Saffham: Parked outside Woolworths, several women came and talked. No sales and it was freezing.

Norwich—at the BBC: After we were plied with drinks the interviewer went through the questions. Most of them were trivialising, like "What do you think of Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie, the most prolific women writers this century?", we said that they didn't challenge traditional images of women so we weren't selling their books.

9pm: A dozen women from local groups came to meet us, they were very supportive. Joan and Doris are taking time off work to join us. A women's centre has opened in Norwich and we took copies of local newsletters to hand out.

Tuesday Oct. 4th

Stalham: Found a market where we were able to set up the stall under cover. Lots of interested women around. Sold books and had good discussions. Joan met a potential new member for the Norwich group.

University of East Anglia: We were really welcomed. Many women bought books they specifically wanted but couldn't get locally. We talked about why we weren't more positive about selling to men—we want to direct our energies towards women.

Evening: We met a group of women from Ipswich, who told us about their plans to start a feminist magazine.

Wednesday Oct. 5th

Ipswich: Set up outside a nursery as women were there with their children. Though they hadn't been expecting us they bought lots of books—especially ones on child-care.

Moved on to a factory—just finished setting up for the shift change when it began to rain, so we had to leave.

24 hours a day collective decisions grind us down but it's good working things out together. It's great meeting so many strong feminists who have to travel miles to meetings and who meet very few other feminists.

Woodbridge: Stayed with Lindsay who showed us how to spin and came to the stall the next day.

Thursday Oct. 6th

Woodbridge: Stopped at a school. We

Women's Bookbus

Feminist books and magazines are not sold in most shops—because the commercial distribution network is controlled by men who are only interested in making a profit. Most feminist writing is not seen as being profitable.

This summer a group of us got together to try to do something about this. We decided to organise a Women's Libera-

tion Bookbus to take publications to small towns and villages, both to committed feminists and to women who've never read feminist publications.

We raised £185 at a jumble sale to pay for a trial run. We decided to go to Norfolk and Suffolk—there are few big bookshops there, it's not far from London and we had some contacts. Here's how it went, based on the diary we wrote.



Kyson Road School, Woodbridge

heard the women saying "Let's go and have a look"—many took leaflets, but most didn't have money with them to buy books. We felt good about this stop, so many women came and chatted with interest. Maybe it helps when women are together—they don't feel so shy. **Market place:** Rained again—tried to set up a polythene cover over the stall but it looked very uninviting.

Framlingham: Went to town centre but the schedule said the castle—we hadn't expected women to be there but in fact six women were waiting for us. Most hadn't expected women to be there but in fact six women were waiting for us. Most hadn't met before so they exchanged addresses, but we felt bad—we must stick to the timetable. Stayed the night with Margaret—log fires, home made cider . . .

Friday Oct. 7th

Diss: Interest from passing women, several sales, two press interviews, but hassles about parking in the market.

Harlston: Drizzle, place deserted.

Saturday Oct 8th

Bury St Edmunds: Lots of interest from passers by. Talked about a permanent bookbus and the long-term lifestyle it would mean. It's wearing always being 'on show'

and it's difficult to relax meeting new people constantly. Selling seems less important than talking with women.

Sudbury: Val who lives locally spent the afternoon on the stall. Lots of women shopping in the market came up to us, one talked about her life since her husband's death. A good final afternoon.

Post script

We learned a lot about how the Bookbus could operate and the trial run convinced us that it's worth carrying on and trying to find a way of making it a viable, full-time project. We're looking at ways of getting grants. We've already received a £10 donation—thanks! We hope that as well as promoting feminist publications and ideas, the Bookbus will be a stimulus for women to write and print. We'd like to hear from any other women who want to talk about setting up a similar project in their area and from women who have ideas about financing it and places for us to visit. It won't be possible for us to do any more long trips until we have the money, but we're building up a list of contacts around Britain. We also need more collective members (we're London based), if you're interested please contact us at: 24 Palace Road, London N8. ○



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